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ESSAY

Normal Society, Schizophrenia, and Reality: A Critical View

John Hawkins

I. Prologue

Perhaps at no other period in history have we been afforded the luxury, of examining our perspective on reality and its relationship to our social structure, as well as to the mores and values by which we govern our behavior, than at present. It is largely due to the discoveries of the infant science, Psychology, which has forced such an investigation. The problems of schizophrenia in particular, have *brought forth* not only new views on *how reality manifests itself* but also on *how individuals and society meet its special challenge.*

For many years the practical idea of reality had been taken for granted (philosophers, poets, and artists have, of course, always tinkered with its more abstract qualities): Practically, one either fits into society or one was tossed out on one's naughty little ear. If one happened to be a 'madman,' then one was locked away in a 'madhouse' for the duration, simple as that. The reasons for one's madness were, more or less, overlooked for the fact. This procedure does not seem to be nearly as common today as in the past (although the fallout from the John Hinckley case and other media-genic dramas threatens to reverse this hard-won breakthrough).

Along with the incredible technological and scientific progression over the last one hundred years, as well as with a collective backward glance over our shoulders to our Romantic and sometimes *self*-indulgent predecessors, a new wave of humanism seems to have slowly begun to develop. We have become somewhat interested in the whys of madness (although, as well shall see, only on a restricted level). And so, when trained investigators like Freud, Adler, and Jung began to stumble in the dark over their own psychological toys like *id, unconscious* and *collective unconscious*, new approaches to reality had to be developed. When later investigators began to ponder schizophrenia, bizarre, unheard of questions began to fall like sleet from the grey cloudy matter of their brains. *What is our practical development of reality? Does reality differ in individuals? How are such differences manifested? Is there even such a beast we may call reality?*

Such questions are not easily answered and it is certainly well beyond the intentions and scope of this essay to attempt to deal with them here in their entirety. But, because it is schizophrenia which has led to such new and challenging moral and metaphysical questions, it is my purpose here to briefly examine the implications to our society, and to us as individuals, in the way we determine who is schizophrenic and how we deal with him. I shall detail my ideas of society, the individual, schizophrenia, and their relationship to each other later in the essay. But before an examination of these terms can be undergone I think it advisable to describe first the particular way in which I will be referring to the term reality, since later understanding of the terms will depend to a large extent on its usage.

II. What Is Reality?

Each of us has his or her idea of what reality is, and it should be obvious that our own idea of it is very likely to be the one that seems truest to us. Theories of reality abound because individuals abound, yet we are often led to believe that one particular theorist has finally pinned the evasive devil to the wall for all of us to see. Certainly, this was true in the intellectual circles of his time, and well after, when Descartes claimed that reality is once and for all neatly summed up in his nifty "cogito, ergo sum." And yet, 'the mischief in me' would have me reply to that: "cogito, ergo sum"—corrected: I think I am, therefore I feel compelled to believe it. Both are relatively, though not absolutely, true.

Too often, though, theories of anything—let alone reality—seem to be merely a part of imagination's foreplay in its intercourse with words. Nevertheless, a given theory of reality does have its value: it serves rather nicely as a reviewing standards of sorts from which to view the flow of 'lesser,' though often more interesting, thoughts the theorist wishes to parade before us. And so, it is with these prefacing remarks that I propose to construct my 'reviewing stand' from which the reader may observe my 'lesser' thoughts.

By reality I shall mean this: *the demonstration of the relative completeness of an individual's conception of the meaning of his own existence.* (Thus, depending upon the extent to which such a conception is completed will indicate the extent to which an individual has approached reality). With this idea of reality in mind we shall presently examine society, the individual, and schizophrenia within the common notion that the schizophrenic can be distinguished from normal people by his supposed "marked break with reality." (Whether a 'disease' is of functional or organic origin, this seems to be considered, in psychological circles, the one consistent hallmark of the schizophrenic and of mental illness in general). The time would now seem proper to give a brief sketch of the structure and purpose of normal society, to then follow up with an identification of the quality of the individuals which compose it, and, finally, to examine the schizophrenic in society and how society handles his unique problem.

III. Society, The Individual, And The Utility Of Illusion

A brief sketch of normal (modern America) society shows that through its power structure and cultural base it contains many elements whose intentions are to deceive and provide illusions for the people. "There is, for example," as

Richard Lazarus points out, "the collective illusion that our society is free, moral, and just, which, of course, isn't always true." And conversely, he adds, the majority of people in society desire such illusions: "In effect, we pilot our lives in part by illusions and by self-deceptions that give meaning and substance to our lives." But in order to accept such illusions we must somewhat insubstantiate and depersonalize the world of others. "A partial depersonalization of others is extensively practiced in everyday life and is regarded as normal if not highly desirable," says R.D. Laing in his book *The Divided Self.* But what are some of the reasons why man assembles in societies?

All people fear their own finity and the aloneness it entails, and this is surely to be expected because finity sets limits and tends to further complicate our abilities to find meaning in our already complicated lives. Perhaps the closest we ever get to infinity is by progenity, in creating another intimately like us. It is finity—and not *infinity*—which strikes as so abstract and indeterminable. For we can easily imagine ourselves 'living forever,' of being infinite (although the details and implications of such imagining differ with each individual)—and there is something concrete and digestible in this idea, which may be why we invented the 'soul' and 'Heaven.' Yet, how can one find meaning and security in the fact that one may at any given time, and for no good reason, cease to be, to die?

Most human beings may simply be unequipped to see meaning in anything so cold and monstrously abstract as finity. This is I think, in part, the basic purpose for founding societies and for creating a culture within it. Societies live forever, and there is no small consolation for us in belonging to something which approaches infinity, and in which, if we are prudent, steadfast, and lucky, we may leave behind some small mark or distinction that shall be attended to and remembered long after we have been ourselves led by 'the eternal footman' down the dusky charnel halls of our own finitude.

And so, though we often question the apparent madness of its methods, society may be for most the only method of preventing their madness *en masse*; thus, may indeed be justified in defending itself against the whims and distractions of the petulant individual. For, despite its many faults, society understands (to some degree) the basic despair of the individual in its keep. It has, in a sense, 'infinite' compassion for the rebellious individual that all of us are to varying degrees of intensity. Thus, we understand, through T.S. Eliot, when *J. Alfred Prufrock's* mind rebels against the consciousness of his time and asks:

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

We feel such a question to the core, for it elicits, in us all the apparent haplessness, hopelessness, and lonliness or our existence. Society says soothingly to such rebels of thought, in effect: *'It's okay to feel as you do about your life—we all concur that finding meaning in such apparent meaningless seems, at best, futile.'* We also understand the 'Henry' in John Berryman who sighs: "Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so." Yet, say so we must, for we are struck by its truth. However, rebelling against society directly is flatly unacceptable: *'Air your feelings in the forum of Culture: write a novel or poem, paint a painting, compose a symphony, show us a new perspective on relativity, run for Congress. Yes, air your feelings, but don't act upon them for fear of exile.'* The criminal and the schizophrenic both act upon their feelings, and so they are exiled. But his warning is ancient and is, perhaps, the universal social unbreachable. This dictum not only applies to people who are called criminals and schizophrenics, but extends and can be clearly seen in the cases of Socrates and Christ (but that's another essay).

It is a dictum that applies not only *even if* one's purpose is the truth, but *especially* if that is one's purpose. When we enlist in a society there are certain unspoken terms we agree to: we agree to cohere and organize ourselves as a people by permitting—even demanding—deception by our peers, by authorities, and by ourselves. For most people society is *an indestructable crystal palace* in which their physical needs are secured and their reasons for being are bought and sold as easily as groceries at a market. It takes a rebel like Doestoyevsky's 'underground man' to remind us of the danger of such complacency:

So, you believe in an indestructible crystal palace in which you won't be able to stick out your tongue or blow raspberries even if you cover your mouth with your hand. But I'm afraid of such a palace precisely because it's indestructible and because I won't ever be allowed to stick my tongue out at it.

Thus, though our sense of humanity compels us at times to feel some compassion for prisoners and mental patients, "people . . . do not feel as sorry as they do relieved," according to The Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health, "to have out of the way persons whose behavior disturbs and offends them," since by their behavior and ideation they have demonstrated their rejection of the terms of 'the social contract.' Further, although as a society we must decide upon what *the social norm* is to be, which is another way of defining boundaries of social control and stability, we cannot decide as a society on what is real, since reality exists and is only approachable, if at all, through the individual; therefore, society abhors reality because it does not fall under its jurisdiction and control, and its presence can only lead to instability within the state.

Clearly, then, what we mean when we say one demonstrates a "marked break with reality" is that his behavior suggest no recognition of common, taken-for-granted rules of behavior. Yet, it is not a "marked break with reality" he demonstrates, but a marked break with *us*, with our standard perspectives, and with our norms of expected and predictable behavior. The reason is lacking for suggesting that a schizophrenic veers from reality, for, on the contrary, he cannot *escape* it, he can no longer shield its light with the normal curtain of illusion, and though he certainly fools himself when he claims to be the King of Spain, it is through the absurdity of the life he lives that demonstrates the 'reality' of the very absurdity of life itself. We have already admitted that a society has the right to protect itself and its people, but where do we draw the line for the deviant individual? Why do we incarcerate him, and, in effect, exile him from society?

IV. The Exile Of The Deviant Individual

In Massachusetts, by statue, no one can be committed for mental illness unless he or she is dangerous to self or to others, And yet, according to R. D. Laing, "there are other

people who are regarded as sane, whose minds are radically unsound, who may be equally or more dangerous to themselves and others, and whom society does not regard as psychotic and fit persons to be in a madhouse." So, how do we decide upon who gets locked away in a mental institution and who does not?

The question is not an easy one to answer. On the surface it may seem easier to lock away a schizophrenic because his bizarreness and distance do not readily permit analysis as to his dangerousness. But, again, we would be basing our judgment upon his apparent relationship to reality. We've also pointed out, though, that a society that pampers illusions and self-deceptions is not the best judge of reality. Despite this paradox, it is members of society who arrange for a deviant to be pronounced deranged and shipped off to a 'nuthouse.' Rarely does an individual pronounce himself sick. As Thomas Szasz points out in his book *Ideology and Insanity:*

Most people who are considered mentally sick (especially those confined involuntarily) are so defined by their relatives, friends, employers, or perhaps the police — not by themselves. These people have upset the social order — by disregarding the conventions of polite society or by violating laws — so we label them "mentally ill" and punish them by commitment to a mental institution.

Often enough, when we do incarcerate a schizophrenic, we do so quietly, without the fuss of his constitutional right to a trial by his peers. And also often enough to-be-mental-patients, particularly schizophrenics, are deceived into being incarcerated against their wills. The process usually follows this pattern: prior to incarceration, and after interviews with people who 'love' the deviant, he is met by a team (or less) of 'therapeutic specialists' whose purpose is not so much to alleviate the deviant's anguish (as one might expect) as to interrogate the person. Can said deviant be determined to be dangerous to himself or others, and if so, how can he be most effectively persuaded into 'volunteering' his own commitment? He is told that based upon what he has divulged (or not divulged) to the therapists, it would be simple enough to secure a "pink paper" (an order of commitment) from a court, in which case his incarceration could be indefinite. After setting up this "pink paper" scenario, he is assured that 'voluntary' commitment would be his wisest move, especially since the potential sentence is lighter. If such an insidious process of coercion does not lead to the deviant's final dis-illusionment, then it certainly seems ample justification for insuring that he does, indeed, become dangerous to himself or others.

V. Diagnosing Schizophrenia

Contrary to popular belief (if there is a popular belief on the matter), the incarcerated deviant is not diagnosed until *after* he has been unfreed; prior to this his condition had been assumed, though, no doubt, by trained 'therapeutic specialists.' Meanwhile, one wonders what effect the bondage has had upon the subject's ability to surive his own self-disintegration, especially in the context of having been *judged* unacceptable to society before even being *charged* with being schizophrenic. How does one go about differentiating the abnormalness of the environment thrust upon the subject from the abnormalness of the subject? "An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal," writes Viktor E. Frankl based upon his experience of being placed in a concentration camp because he was *abnormal*, because he was a Jew.

It may be of no small value to come up with a better description of what a schizophrenic is, though I shall forego the clincial descriptions because of the enormous amount of them. I shall use existential descriptions in their stead, since the problem would seem to be more existential than clinical anyway. The philosopher Nietzsche wrote toward the end of his life the following note to a friend: "I go everywhere in my student's coat, and here and there slap somebody on the shoulder and say: *Are we not content? I am the god who has created this caricature.*" Naturally, his friend had just cause to be alarmed, and one feels compelled to question Nietzsche's sanity when we read this because its bizarreness rattles our quiet mundanity. And, indeed, Nietzsche wrote the note under the influences of the final stages of syphilis. And while his note may actually caricature the profundity of his life and work, can it be said that it demonstrates "a marked break with reality?" Whose? Yours or his?

R. D. Laing says, "people who experience themselves as automata, as robots, as bits of machinery, or even as animals . . . are rightly regarded as crazy. Yet why do we not regard a theory that seeks to transmute persons into automata or animals as equally crazy?" Normal people do not easily see the point to such musing because their own sanity is not in question. But if the schizophrenic makes the error of regarding himself as a robot, then we err, too, in our failure to see that our own pleasant predictability so often resembles that of a robot.

To reiterate, we are entitled as a society to our idea of what is sane and what is not, but we must keep in mind that when we make this leap of judgment we do so at the risk of asking something as equally dangerous of ourselves: namely, what is our relationship to reality, and how sane are we in truth? The *sane* Nietzsche expresses this dilemma rather well: "What we do in dreams we also do when we are awake: we invent and fabricate the person with whom we associate — and immediately forget we have done so." If we compare this to how Géza Róheim explains the schizophrenic's relationship with others in his book *Magic and Schizophrenia*, we find an interesting parallel: "Not infrequently, a part of the personality detaches itself and is then attached to another person . . . whatever the patient does or hallucinates is an experience of another person." In considering another person's existence, are we not fabricating, and are we not detaching a part of our personality and attaching it to another? Here is would seem that we are not all that distinct from the schizophrenic.

Yet, what, then, are these schizophrenics? Are they, to quote the words of Thomas Bulfinch, "souls to which bodies are to be given in due time. Meanwhile, they dwell on Lethe's bank and drink oblivion of their former lives"? Or is the schizophrenic, as Julian Jaynes suggests' "In effect . . . a mind bared to his environment waiting on gods in a godless world"? It is, in part, both of these and more. However, there is a major difference between the normal person and the schizophrenic. The normal person, secure in his own illusions, becomes convicted enough to postulate his own self-autonomy. On the other hand, the schizophrenic feels devoid of an autonomy of self. Instead of acting upon reality, it acts upon him. What T. S. Eliot says of words is also true of many schizophrenics:

"Shrieking voices/Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering/Always assail them." The schizophrenic is ghosted, haunted by his former self, as I've captured in one of my earliest poems:

Caves, like eye sockets
with no eyes, watch
The clenching hideous grin —
Dash! Dash! Ha . . . HAAAaaa! in frenzy
To the jagged mind below.

Many schizophrenics hear voices or visually hallucinate. How odd this seems to us, and yet, the prophets of the Old Testament, too, heard voices and had visions, but this does *not* seem odd to us, which strikes one as oddest of all. For the one would secure all our 'faith,' while we lock away the other in a mental institution.

VI. Treatment Of Schizophrenia

Treatment of schizophrenia is at all times threatening. How can one hope to revert an alleged abnormal person who has been confined for a prolonged period of time in an abnormal environment back to the average normal socialite? Obviously, there is little hope of this. So, the main purpose of confinement must be imprisonment, not treatment. In fact, the *mental hospital* is an illusion; it differs only in name and kind from a prison. The major difference between a prisoner and a mental patient is that a prisoner is serving time for having *done something* unacceptable to society, while the mental patient is serving time for being unacceptable *himself.* In a moving account of his own descent into the bizarre schizophrenic world of self-disintegration and ultimate disillusionment, and of his subsequent return, Mark Vonnegut, son of the famous novelist, gives his first impressions of the other patients upon his admittance to a mental hospital:

All the other patients fit nicely into my idea of what mental hospitals were about. They were all victims one way or another. They had been dealt lousy parents, lousy jobs, lousy marriages, lousy friends, lousy educations. They hadn't had breaks. No one really loved them . . . Their craziness, their being in a mental hospital, was so understandable. Good, brave people who had done the best they could until it was just too much.

VII. A Prognosis And Conclusion

It is no wonder that the prognosis for schizophrenia is not good, which is why the schizophrenic is usually not returned to normal society, and why, if he is, is often reincarcerated for his ailment. It is as though the schizophrenic, once having experienced the terror of his self collapsing, can never again accept the deceit and dehumanization that is so much a part of normal society. Yet such treatment is hard to figure. For, if we grant for a moment that consciousness itself seems at times a kind of sickness, we see that each and all of us, whether a rebel or an active and somewhat satisfied participant in society, are to some degree sick. As T. S. Eliot reminds us:

The whole earth is our hospital
Endowed by the ruined millionaire,
Wherein, if we do well, we shall
Die of the absolute paternal care
That will not leave us, but prevents us
everywhere.

It appears then that the notion that the schizophrenic can be distinguished from one of normal society by his "marked break with reality" is inaccurate, since society does not know what reality is, and cannot, therefore, advise as to what a break with reality is. However, all three terms (normal society, schizophrenia, and reality) deserve a more comprehensive scrutiny to further clarify their meanings, truth values, and inter-relationship. One can only hope that he is not alone.

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THIRD WORLD VOICE

LATIN AMERICA
Looking Back at 1982

Willian Henriquez

1982 was Ronald Reagan's second year in the White House and the clash between his administration and the progressive forces of change in Latin America dominated political events throughout the whole American continent. It was the second year of recession in the U.S., where interest rates dramatically hit the region's economies. There was also an old style colonial war (England-Argentina), a frontier was (Nicaragua-Honduras), fraudulent elections, numerous coups and a new round of IMF-imposed austerity programs.

Dave Parziale

U.S. capital in Latin America has rapidly expanded and now encompasses a comprehensive range of interests and linkages that increasingly demand policies which facilitate the reproduction and security of their investments, loans, and licensing agreements. The growth of European and Japanese competition with the region, the rising level of internal class conflicts, and the declining position of the U.S. in Asia, the Eastern countries and the Middle East, are problematic for the U.S. [These issues] From the Regan administration point of view, demand an aggressive foreign policy designed to enhance all dimensions of U.S. involvements, to crowd out foreign competitors and to repress the internal challenges of the Latin American revolutionary forces.

The most obvious ingredient in the Reagan position toward Latin America is the militarization of the U.S. foreign policy. Hence diplomatic and political measures are subordinated in an absolute effort to promote a military apparatus and to strengthen linkages with repressive forces in target countries. This policy involves a massive expansion of military programs, an increasing presence of U.S. military personnel in conflict situations, greater arms sales, strengthening ties with right-wing dictatorships, unleashing the CIA for direct action against Latin America progressive government, as well as preparing for direct intervention where revolutions are imminently successful.

The political framework for this foreign policy is the myth of East-West confrontation. According to the simplistic view of Reagan and most of his administration, the East-West conflict permeates all international relations and regions. The "doctrine" proclaims that all conflicts either emanate from Soviet designs, or, if not, should be subordinated to the U.S. to impede them. Hence all countries in the region should accept the U.S. definition of their political priorities. Under the cover of reviving the East-West global confrontation doctrine, the White House hopes not only to crush revolutionary forces, but to advance U.S. economic and military interests at the expense of the revolutionary and nationalistic internal forces. The projection of the global confrontation thesis serves as the ideological attempt by the Reagan Administration to reestablish the world of the 1950's in which Latin America appeared merely as a series of client-states, holding the door exclusively open for U.S. capital and its strategic interests.

Despite the considerable efforts of the Reagan administration to prevent and control the Latin American conflicts by many means, the region is in a general process of progressive upswing. The revolutionary forces continue advancing within a complex, contradictory and constant flux; from partial electoral gains and successful guerrilla wars on the positive side, to military coups, and transitory setbacks of the revolutionary forces on the negative side.

The most intense level of class conflict in Latin America is found in the situation of mass insurgency in Central America, where the presence of armed vanguards, capable of combating the depredations of the regime, are making serious attempts to take state power. In El Salvador the armed struggle has evolved to a point where "dual power" exists where local popular governance parallels the repressive authorities. El Salvador has been in a state of war in which the military regime is engaged in a campaign against the vast mass organizations and the popularly based guerrilla forces. Throughout the entire year the FMLN (the military front of the popular movement) launched a series of guerrilla offensives against the government which did not satisfy the guerrillas' own expectations. However, they achieved important strategic aims and time is on their side, rather than the government's.

In Guatemala, guerrilla actions and military repression reached almost Salvadorean proportions. The most important feature of the Guatemalan struggle is the incorporation of the Indian masses in the growing guerrilla movements. Because of its size and economic importance, Guatemala could be a decisive gain for the revolution, or a fatal domino for the U.S. to lose. That is why Reagan gave the green light and massive armament supplies the the Rios Montt regime in his counterinsurgency campaign. However, terror and weaponry will not sustain the regime nor will it prevent the revolution. The Rios Montt regime is becoming more and more isolated from the people and Reagan's "aid" will further this trend. The military capacity of the guerrilla movements as well as the activism of the urban working class increased significantly in 1982.

The class conflicts in Nicaragua have entered into a new phase of political and social organization of the armed organs of the Sandinista state. The contradiction between the popular state and the private economy continues, and is effected by the level of struggle of Central America as a whole. The tendency of the Nicaraguan revolution to consolidate its gains has come into conflict with Washington's efforts to roll back the process. Consequently, the Sandinista policy of peaceful coexistence of different social systems, pluralism and nonintervention in other countries' affairs has come into conflict with Washington's crusade against "international communism." After cutting all types of economic aid, the Reagan administration concentrated its fire on what is described as the Sandinistas' move into the Cuban camp, and their support for the Salvadorean revolution. The Sandinistas had good reason to fear a destabilization campaign backed by the U.S. which has armed and trained Somocista mercenaries who have launched serious attacks against Nicaragua along the Honduran border. The last attack of 1982 was on December 14 where almost 3,000 thousand well-equipped mercenaries attacked the department of Nueva Segovia at the Honduran border for six days. The military clash between the U.S.-Honduran backed mercenaries and the Sandinistas has taken the proportion of a large-scale war with the deployment of tanks and heavy artillery. So Reagan not only intervenes to prevent revolutions (El Salvador and Guatemala) but is prepared to intervene to reverse and overthrow revolutionary governments which have achieved recognition by its own people and in the international community.

Cuba was the villain of the Reagan foreign policy. Recently, relations with Havana reached perhaps their lowest point since early 1960. According to the White House, the Cubans were behind almost every revolutionary action or conflict in the hemisphere. However, the lack of evidence and the overstatement weakened Washington's arguments. Cuba's sympathy for the revolutionary movements and its inclination to give moral and material support was not unknown. Significantly, many non-revolutionary Latin American governments were less worried by Cuba than by what Washington might have in mind for the island. Havana took the threat seriously enough to decree an alert for popular mobilization to defend itself from any possible invasion from the U.S.

The most important regional power opposed to Washington's foreign policy was Mexico. The former President, Jose Lopez Portillo was an advocate of the need for dialogue in the whole Central American region as the only way to seek peace. Mexico also rejected the so-called "Soviet-Cuban penetration" as the cause of the conflicts in Central America and reaffirmed the right of Cuba and Nicaragua to exist.

The England-Argentina war over the Falklands (Malvinas) was one of the most important developments in Latin America in 1982. For Argentina the outcome of the war opened a new political situation where the military regime is daily becoming more isolated and blamed for the negative results of the "dirty war"; the Argentinian people have passed from the defensive to the offensive against the government, although the struggle still retains a local character it is linked to immediate economic issues. The repression and the use of terror has been ineffective to stop the popular movement for democracy and the fascist regime seems to be near its end.

The U.S. open support for England in the war against Argentina contributed to the changing of policy of many Latin American governments who had disagreed with Reagan's position against Argentina. Venezuela for example, who before the war supported the Reagan policy toward Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador, suddenly seized the banner of Argentinian claims to its territory in the South Atlantic and started attacking the "evils of the imperialism and colonialism in the region." Venezuela also improved its relations with Managua and dropped its support for the Reagan "pacification program" in Cental America.

The last major events that have reduced the effectiveness of the U.S. strategy and has changed the correlation of political forces in the continent were the elections for two popular governments. In Colombia the election of the

President Belisario Betancour constituted a reverse for the Reagan administration because Betancour supports Cuba's acceptance in the OAS (Organization of American States) and has a more realistic perspective on the conflict in Central America. In Bolivia the popular government of Siles Suazo, which seized power with a strong mass organization and with a strong presence of the left in the government (two of the ministers of the new government are members of the Communist Party), shifted the balance of power in favor of the progressive forces in Latin America, and said upon his inauguration "I open relations with Cuba because it's part of Latin America."

Given the increasingly unpopularity of the U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, Ronald Reagan decided to visit Brazil, Colombia and Honduras in December with the objective of putting together a group of countries that shared Washington's simplistic view of the world. However, in every country that Reagan visited he clashed with people in demonstrations and with the responsible postures of the Colombian government who called attention to the repression in Central America supported by Washington. Reagan also failed to meet with the Venezuelan president who refused to talk with him under present circumstances.

The weakening of the Reagan strategy toward Latin America was an important gain of the Latin American people in 1982. However, the emergence of class conflicts and the growing bank and corporate interests of the U.S. are still at a point of confrontation politics: the U.S. government and the right-wing and military dictatorships on one side and the mobilized and armed people on the other. From the endemic conflicts and political and social confrontation throughout the society in a multiplicity of forms, millions of Latin Americans see their future with optimism.

Reflections On The Massacres In Lebanon

Nick Aksionczyk

> "The whole campaign over the last ten days" to blame Israel for the massacre of Palestinians in West Beirut was "unbelievable, fantastic, and totally despicable." (Minister Menachem Begin — *New York Times*, 10/2/82)

As an objective observer of recent events in Lebanon, I wonder how many more people would have been massacred if the Israeli army had *not* been present to put a halt to the slaughter of about 300 Palestinians by Lebanese Christian militiamen? I'm grateful that it was at least stopped.

It's interesting to consider a letter dated Sept. 29 by Mr. Begin, which said: "Take over as soon as possible the major function between the two parts of Beirut to prevent a revenge on the Moslem population by the Christians."

Too bad the Israeli army wasn't around to also put a halt to the slaughter of about 300 Lebanese civilians, mostly Christians, by the PLO and Lebanese Moslems in Damur. I wonder why the press and the media did not condemn this four day massacre on Jan. 17, 1976 in Damur and recommend a commission to investigate this massacre as well? Where were all the pictures of the piles of corpses for us to mourn over? I never saw *one* picture in the paper or on television of even *one* dead Lebanese civilian out of 300 who were killed. Isn't all life precious? Murder is murder no matter who commits it!

Furthermore, it is interesting to know who is supplying weapons to the PLO in its massacres and acts of terrorism in Lebanon. According to a reporter who covered the so-called Israeli invasion of Lebanon in mid-June, the Israelis were removing forty truckloads of Communist-made weapons and ammunition PER DAY. For example, in back of an apartment building in one underground garage there was found thousands of cases of ammunition, weapons, and Soviet-made rocket launchers. Also found were mortar shells provided by the "peace-loving" communists in China and placed by the PLO in areas heavily populated with civilians. Why isn't anyone condemning the sale of bullets and rockets to the PLO by international communism? All bullets kill, no matter who supplies them!

If the stories about the killings of hundreds by Lebanese Christians in Beirut generated days of banner headlines and worldwide criticism of Israel for not preventing the killing, shouldn't there have been stories about the killing of hundreds by the PLO in Damur for at *least* the same amount of time with headlines and world-wide criticism of the PLO and Lebanese Moslems who were *directly* responsible for their horrible massacre? There appears to be a double standard applied to Israel.

Many overlook the fact that it was not the Israelis who actually committed the killings in the refugee camps in the first place. The truth of the matter is that it was Arabs who murdered Arabs in Damur as well as in Beirut. The main difference was that the Israelis fortunately stopped the massacre in Beirut, but unfortunately no one stopped the massacre in Damur. If we must condemn Israel, why not criticise them for not having been in Damur to halt that terrible massacre as well? Instead of being manipulated by the media to become anti-Semitic racists, why not simply demand that all foreign forces — Israeli, Palestinian, and Syrian — get out of Lebanon?

Wavelength

Submissions deadline
April 4, 1983

Michael Gunst

Guatemala Speaks. . . .

Bill Allen

Wavelength interviews Rigoberta Menchu, Efrain Rosales and Ricardo Fallas

Three members of the Guatemalan resistance movement were recently in Boston to bring their position to the American people. This is part of an interview that they gave to *Wavelength* in December at a conference on the *Role of the Catholic Church* (in the "Struggle for Justice in Guatemala.")

In understanding Guatemala it is important to know that 70% of the population is Indian. These people retain their traditional cultures and languages. The majority of the Indians still speak little or no Spanish.

This interview was conducted by J. Wiltshire and W. Allen. Translation by W. Allen and M. A. Mahony. Transcription by M. Pulgarin.

Wavelength: Could you tell us where you come from, your experiences, and why you are here?

Rigoberta Menchu: I am from the northern part of the province of Quiché in Guatemala. I am a Quiché Indian and I speak the Quiché language. And, I am proud to say, I was made an orphan by the repression in my country; that is to say, my parents were assassinated — burned alive along with the rest of my family.* I am not sure whether or not any of my family is still alive but they are part of a people that is suffering.

Efrain Rosales: I am from the village of La Estancia which is four kilometers from the town of Santa Cruz de Quiché. I too am an Indian: a peasant and a weaver. I also left Guatemala suffering persecution by the government, by the death squads. I have suffered due to the assassination, torture and kidnapping of many people I know: neighbors, relatives, friends, and leaders of the different organizations in my village. Many people of Quiche were tortured and murdered. For these reasons and because I myself survived one of the massacres I left Guatemala after the coup d'etat of Rios Montt.

Ricardo Fallas: I am a Jesuit priest. I am a Guatemalan, born in Guatemala, and at one time I was an anthropologist too. I have now been outside of Guatemala for three years.

Rigoberta Menchu

The reason I left, together with other priests, was to help Nicaragua where the poeple had just begun the process of insurrection leading to the final triumph. We believed it was important to help, in many different ways. But since then the situation has become worse in Guatemala and I have not been able to return to my country.

Rigoberta: For your information I have also left Guatemala to fulfill a specific task. I am representing the Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity. This is the political organization which represents the struggle of our people at all levels. We are working to establish relationships with governments and political parties. At the same time our task is to denounce internationally what is happening in our country.

Efrain: I am crying out a specific task also. In Guatemala the government has censored all of the media. This is not something new, for our people have always been silenced. They have never had access to the media. Today, however, things are worse with the censorship of the media by the Rios Montt government. We know perfectly well that here in the States the people don't know what is happening in Guatemala. There are always news reports coming from the human rights organizations, and some journalists try to expose what is going on in Guatemala. However, these reports do not reach the States. The international news organizations shorten, change and distort this news.

Thus, it is important, and a Christian duty, not to hide and be quiet about what is happening in Guatemala. There are massacres, torture, and kidnappings. The children suffer, the women suffer, the old people suffer. A scorched earth policy is being carried out by the government as well as a policy of "strategic hamlets."* One hundred villages have been massacred in Guatemala. Thus we should not be quiet. It is necessary to let the world know and at the same time ask directly for the help of the North American people. For in this trip we need to touch their hearts so that they come to realize what is happening in Guatemala; that people are starving and are sick — that tears and blood are running in the streets of Guatemala. We ask the North American people to exert pressure on their Congressmen and government to keep military aid from resuming — that is to say helicopter parts and military advisors. This aid helps them to continue massacring our pople.

Wavelength: It seems to us that the Indians of Guatemala have been able to maintain their culture over the centuries in the face of enormous difficulties. Could you speak a little about that?

Rigoberta: It's true that in Guatemala we have a rich history and there are rich elements in our culture today. the indigenous population has resisted during long years, during various periods of suffering. Our grandparents tell us that they were almost slaves, that the landowners did not pay them even a cent, that they performed the work of horses.

It is possible to say that the rebellion of the Indians did not begin today nor in the 60's or the 70's. History tells us that there have been many rebellions by the Indians. They have tried to struggle together. However the enemy with his sophisticated apparatus has tried to smother these struggles.

Now the Indian is being exterminated. The hatred of the Guatemalan regime for the Indian is very serious, very great. Why? Because this is another period of direct war between the government and the Indian. The rebellion now is not only of protest but of concrete struggle.

The Popol Vul, the sacred book of the Quiché Maya speaks of struggle and resistance to oppression. Now we are practicing this philosophy in our struggle, which terrifies our enemy, leaving them no other alternative than to raise arms against my people who are in the majority.

We know very well that the struggle of our people will never be extinguished even with threats, bullets and blood.

Yes, death is a danger for us. Our culture is threatened. It is most important to stress this to the peoples of the world, the governments, the political parties, and the humanitarian institutions. Often we hear in the mass media that a species of animal is going extinct. People are very concerned. Yet, it seems strange to us that when a culture and a people are in danger, it is difficult for governments and political parties to do anything. In our situation it is also difficult for the mass media to say what is happening.

There is a global struggle that is not only the struggle of the Indian or of the Ladino who speaks Spanish. It is everyone's struggle. Why? Because we understand very well that we are divided the enemy is better able to defeat us. That is what we, the Indians, can say with clarity. We have the political consciousness and the determination to struggle and we have clear objectives. Someday it will be our responsibility to take a position of power in our country.

Thus we reaffirm respect for our identity as Indian people. It doesn't help me if people like my necklace and my dress but they don't respect me. We need our culture respected and not as the object of advertising for tourism. It should not be an object of exploitation, but they should respect our culture. I'm not talking only of respecting, but defending our culture as we and our ancestors have done.

Wavelength: You recently learned Spanish. Can you tell us why this was important?

Rigoberta: We have to learn Spanish so that we can communicate with each other. There are twenty two different Indian languages.

Spanish is a common language inside of Guatemala and internationally. Without knowing Spanish I could not speak as well with you. Thus each compañero has the great responsibility of learning Spanish as a necessity for communication.

However, we are not learning Spanish to substitute it in place of our own languages. On the contrary, today more than ever we understand the worth of our culture and we have the responsibility to save our culture. But there are great efforts on the part of all revolutionaries to learn Spanish. It is the language which unites us in this struggle.

Wavelength: Was there a moment when this became clear?

Rigoberta: The first revolutionaries began to learn Spanish because they could understand Quiché but not Quichi or Nichil. They had to learn in order to communicate. Later on, at all levels of the revolutionary struggle, our compañeros learned to read and speak Spanish, as a beginning step. We also studied the conditions of our country. How many of us are there? How much have we been exploited? How are we discriminated against? Why do they discriminate against us? All this we learned.

Wavelength: Who are people involved in the struggle?

Efrain: The regime calls us communists, subversives and guerrillas — this is an old song of theirs. But in Guatemala the people call us los muchachos (the boys). This is really a movement of the people, it does not come from some other place. These are the best sons of our people. Our goal is really to break the old social structure that has kept us subjugated for centuries.

Wavelength: How do the people organize in the face of the repression? What are the levels of resistance to the repression?

Efrain: There are various forms of resistance. In the vanguard, for example, we have four military organizations that are united. Today the vanguard covers the whole country. Another form of resistance is the organization of the people. Throughout the country the people are organized. We are all organized: the peasants, the church, the Christians, the workers, the journalists, the students.

Rigoberta: Essentially I would like to add that the form of resistance is the armed struggle, for a very special reason. Because our enemies are armed and we know very well that they will not put down their arms unless we organize in the same manner. Since the enemy has all types of military equipment we need an armed revolutionary force.

Inside of the armed struggle there are distinct levels of participation. However, the armed struggle is truly the popular struggle because the enemy has closed off all the other means of organizing ourselves.

However, our people also fight back in various ways without using arms. For example, when the people know the army is coming they chop down trees to block the road. They use whatever means they have to in order to defend themselves against the army: machetes, stones, spears. They may leave the village when there is grave danger. In order to protect themselves the people have to organize.

Today there also exists some manifestations of struggle at the trade union level although this is very clandestine. In this case the workers are organized in a factory but the boss doesn't realize it nor do the local police.

Ricardo: There is another point that is important to make. When Rigoberta spoke of popular struggle she said that trees are knocked down, holes dug and sticks and stones used. But also, each community has an emergency plan. In a community of 60–70 homes, where the weapons are sticks and stones and trees, the people will be massacred when the army arrives with its guns and tanks and helicopters. It is very important for these villagers to have a plan so that they can escape and hide when the army comes.

When this period of repression began, the people had no experience. But they learned — now, the communities that survive the massacres are those that have an emergency plan. The other day a young man told me of a village that the army had entered many times. The

first few times they killed people, but later, there were lookouts posted by the villagers so the people were able to escape. But you have to realize that in a village where there are infants, children and old people it is difficult to move on foot. The people who survive are those who are agile.

Wavelength: What do you need? What can we do to help?

Rigoberta: As the compañero was emphasizing when we began we need solidarity at all levels: moral aid, political aid, economic aid. We are a people in danger of extermination. We want to fight to change this, but to do that we need the help of others.

Concretely, we need the North American people to put pressure on their government so that it stops making war on our continent. We hope the North American people will tell their government that the poor here in the U.S. need jobs and decent wages — things that are denied them because their government spends so much money supporting repressive governments and foreign wars. Let the U.S. Government leave us in peace — we are prepared, determined and willing to choose our own destiny. We are very worried that much more blood will be shed. If they don't stop, we know that there will be another Vietnam in Central America.

BACKGROUND TO SPEAKERS

Father Ricardo Fallas S.J. Guatemalan anthropologist and founding member of the Guatemalan Church in Exile. Organizer of peasant leagues in Guatemala and active in concientization groups in a popular barrio in Guatemala City. Author of "Quiché Rebelde."

Rigoberta Menchu Quiché Indian woman, member and organizer for Campesino United Committee (CUC). Active in the grass root christian base communities. Founding member of the Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity; presently stationed at the United Nations.

Efrain Rosales Marroquin Quiché Indian campesino. Guatemalan leader of CUC and organizer of numerous credit and savings cooperatives during 1965–1978. Catequist and active leader of christian base communities. Survivor of massacre.

Footnote 1

Rigoberta's father was burned alive in the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City in January of 1980. A group of peasants had occupied the embassy to bring media attention to the murder of many priests in Quiche.

Rigoberta's mother was tortured for a week then left tied to a tree near the police station with a guard. The authorities were waiting for Rigoberta and her sister to come and get her.

Her little brother was kidnapped by the army, tortured and burned alive along with a group of youngsters in the village square.

Footnote 2

Strategic hamlets-This refers to a strategy used in Vietnam by the United States. A village which is suspected of supporting the guerrillas is forcibly moved to another location. The people are put into a compound which is surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by soldiers.

This article is also being published in the Winter/Spring '83 issue of Midnite Notes

Renee Scot Kildow

DRUNK, SEMI-DRUNK AND SOME SOBER PORTRAITS

Wayne Podworny

Heck- Roxbury

James Aka (Sonny Columbus)

Gail

Self- (Kenmore)

Rita 16

Me and Butch X-Mas Day

Tony Dodds
ETTA JAMES

in the name of blues,
you've got the news
that soulful voice to report
wondering why white people fall short.
have i found a good (girl), the things i love
are your music and pearlzzzz.
top ten a.m. are afraid of it, f.m. play it a bit,
where do you go for good shit?
alright, yeh, dig you fig, not the moon nor i
can take away floatations, gyrations, where its at.
groovin, movin, pushin, shovin, whatever you do
begin, like errol flynn, women do know where i
bin. goin to a bad party removes my uh, un, ungh,
do ba do bi di bop hurt that lurks in my mind.
do you mind to get up and funk?

POETRY

Russ Traunstein
COMPOST PILE

Beyond the far corner
of my crumbling shed,
just within line-of-sight
of the pantry window,
the pile molders, swims
in yeasty vapor; a mealy,
crawling turn-over of decay,
regenerate in it's own heat,
a promise of new life.

This spring was the first
in thirty I felt able
to build the pile, to work
old blood, the sweat,
spent muscle of past depression;
to get up from times
too long in a sullen corner
unravelling ancient twine,
denying the furies

that finally drove me
to jump out of my skin.
Now I can sit, at least briefly,
at the old pantry window
and allow my mind the damp,
thin smell of soda biscuits,
fresh milk cooling,
the magic of cinnamon and nutmeg,
the comforting mold
of meat and cheese curing,
and not become too-terribly
depressed or panicky.

I can look past the shed,
over the sparse back fields
into the deep, monotonous woods,
to the humping green hills
in the distance, and know
that my heart and brain
will not burst in the
unknown expansiveness.

Now, every-so-often, I go
to the pile, throw something on.
Occasionally, I turn over a shovel.
Soon, I may mulch the strawberries.
Later, perhaps, my hollyhocks.

Charlene Glorieux

The train is rocking
clickety clack, clickety clack
and me and the conductor
we're sitting back.
The moon is full and yellow.
Dark towns and trees sail by.
And I must be thinking of hitting the sack
cause I'm sitting back
here in the back
in here with the conductor
we're having a chat
and the towns and trees are passing by
as we go clickety clacking down the track
sitting back
me and the conductor
thinking of hitting the sack.

Charlene Glorieux
BETWEEN FRIENDS

I want to bring you to the heart of the matter.

Friendships are like the sea; they ebb and flow.
People in them either wash far apart
or wear into each other.

Those years
we lived in the kitchen.
The light was only strong in the afternoon
between 2 and 3,
but it fell warmly on the wood,
the particle board, the floor.

We were like that:
you were, we were
amber liquids, slow, sweet and comfortable.
Our skins were golden, we were rumpled,
we were halcyon and unknown to each other.

And what are we now?
(You are so familiar, so unknown)
If we are women out of our rocking cradle
embarked in the world
and the light is changing and cold grey trouble breaks,
we still stand
on the boards of our kitchen.

I am not ready to give that up.
I will always see you that way; at heart
it is how I know you best.

Len Haley

A dragon, with its tail around a rock,
Once challenged me to test my skill and live.
I think of that this evening as we talk,
Concealing what we both so want to give.
The blood the fictive reptile squeezed from stone,
As I sit here interpreting your tales,
Reminds me of those efforts of my own
To bite an answer from my fingernails.
Yet, every city saved was not by sword.
There is a brave, true patience to this scene.
Knights saved their king; we try and save our word.
Our dragons now are bloodless and half seen,
Illusive, scaley, creatures of the night.
The hero will decipher wrong from right.

Valeria LaFrancis

Lovers on a target range
taking practice shots
at each other
are dead when one of them
learns to shoot
straight.

Jacques Joseph
AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND

Death an unexpected friend, an unknown
being that has no friends.

No face of emotion, no feeling of
compassion.

No love for anyone, it just comes
and goes.

No question or sorrows, an unexpected
friend.

Julia Robbins
DAILY BREAD

In the early hours
when delivery trucks
scuttle down the city streets
like fat beetles,
ceramic MaDonnas wink
at early morning joggers.
Compulsiveness
is next to Godliness.

And the wives who awaken
before seven A.M.
to provide warm eggs,
and coffee,
they are saints
in quilted bathrobes.
Husbands of America,
rise up and pour forth
your thanks.

But I believe
that some of us
were never meant
to work before noon.
It causes fuzziness of the brain,
like too much sacramental wine.
I lie in bed,
with only the tip of my head sticking out,
a turnip in warm, brown-yellow soil,

praying:
No! Don't uproot me!
I like it here and I want to be eternally
damned to limbo.

Julia Robbins
THE FIRST TIME

Eating the apple and giving him some
was bold enough,
but then Eve guided Adam's tongue
to moister fruit, and encouraged his touch.
And the Garden grew so wildly hot
that a warm rain drenched the thick curled leaves.
The fruit burst
open for their delight,
sweet in taste
and dripping with seed.

Efren Alba
INDULGENCES

the lingering, languishing hours
drinking coffee in deserted places:
only joggers or thinkers interrupt our solitude

we come here to ostensibly discuss "themes" and "symbols"
(we share a course in modern literature)
but these ideas are worked out quickly
or they aren't worked out at all,
as if a critical dispensation absolves us
of urges to finalize

we don't usually reach conclusions,
but leave off abstract matters to talk of ourselves
perhaps to return
and begin a new ellipsis
but this is never certain

we look out at the water,
at the ebbing tide
revealing gravel sea-beds and the rubbery gray kelp,
limp in its exposure

without prodding, our pasts surface,
mostly details to fill in the gaps,
but, sometimes
we dredge up guilts and doubts
and I see the pain glass over your eyes

and I'm afraid that I'm an ugly catalyst,
that the confessional has become my means of relating,
that rancid religious guilt infects us like gangrene,
and I don't know what to feel for you

only the streaking shadow of an osprey,
gliding close in the bay air currents,
wakes one of us from this dream,
to break this spell of empathy

Allison Hurley
THE REFRAIN

And you just let her go. . . .
like spit from the overpass
and you judge the best distance
between yourselves
the warm cold war detente
lesbian style
And she just does as she always did
two faces one for public consumption
one to fit in your dreams dragging the night
the spark left somewhere
behind on the pavement
And she still takes credit for your happiness
misery — now there's a talent
for self preservation
her fire burns like dust in your eyes
still she strains you through the bluest
times she's ever touched
And still you don't tie your shoes
ends trailing til they shorten
out of self defense
in the shuffle of your hardtop walk
and the strut of your bar talk
you shorten the ties between yourselves
no — not one more dance
she gathers your sweat on the tip
of her finger
and swallows the salty
whole of you.

Allison Hurley
LITANY FOR ILLUMINATION

and we are like
and a gull hits a jet/ mid-air/ head-on/ and metal
crumbles from the air.
and we are like
and snow storm clouds/ that gather at the edge/ that turn
to glass/ in fear of their own power/ and sliver into fragments
of view/ till one cannot count/ the many suns/
that blind the few eyes.
and we are like
and the moon who is tangled/ in sunspent clouds/ and lies
exhausted/ in her orange breathlessness/ who can find no sister stars
to herald her coming/ waits/ on the horizon of a subway track/ to bring her
to purple sheets of rest.
and we are like
and there are winds/ that gobble leaves/ in death
a perfection of colour/ that rustles the bass-like call
of winters sour arrival/ mounds of white grainy flakes
our drugged season of sleep/ the great tongue of one/ more/
exiting day will lick the mirror of the lakes/ bring us high
to take us lo— beyond and over the hills.
and we are like
and a jet re-assembles itself/ in mid-air/ the acrobatics
of a mechanized century/ a god-less sky.
and we are like
and still we do not believe each others eyes.

Michelle Mercaldo

Len Haley
MY ISLAND

I explore my island in the semi-dark.
Everything appears settled.
Nothing unusual among the inhabitants here.
Yet, I am haunted by the spectre of a question.
It is hiding here,
Unembodied, in the gathering blue.
I can feel it by the hairs on the back of my neck;
  a concerted, dark fluidity on the horizon behind me.
Yet, when I turn around it's gone —
Retreating, unreconciled, before sight.

r. moreau

two seagulls
three seagulls
eating frenchbread
on the roof next door.
seagull pounds his head
into the french bread
with beak
as a burning t.v. guide
in the fireplace
crunches also.

HERRING COVE — SEPTEMBER, 1982

The late light
Of the lowering sun
Comes flat across the water
And whites the beach, bleaching the dune
Grass to the pale green
Of the underside of leaves,
And blanching the modest dunes
In the cool,
Truthful
Lumination of late summer.

All the light of day
That dazzled on the ocean
For miles
Gathers to a single,
Narrow path
Athwart the calming seawaves,
And on the land,
In the marshes and the scrub pine,
Explodes
And covers everything.

We are alone here.
An hour ago horses
With riders ambled past,
All of them gazing out to sea.
Nearby, a make-shift lean-to
Of branch and board
Stumbles into sand.

The tide is going out
But still the beach is narrow.
Small stones
Form a swept-up garland
Along the water's edge. I heard
The pebbles grind when you walked and sat
And did not glance back
At me.
I hear the gentle ocean break,
First far away, then
Here — at your feet.

You pose in your brown shirt
Smoking and running
Your hands through your burnt
Umber hair — goading me
With your independence,
So satisfied that, for a moment,
When you dropped your head
Your back was like a gravestone,
Draped in brown
And the still white light.

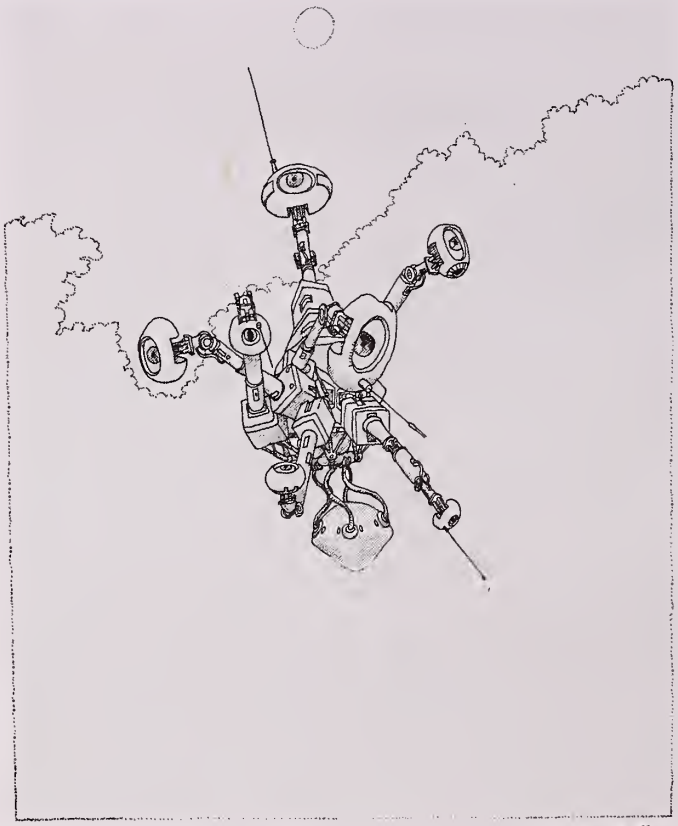
THEY'RE TEARING DOWN OLD CAMBRIDGE LATIN

"So what are bricks and mortar after all?"
I asked while looking at the wrecking crane
Going to its job with such dispatch
I had supposed the operator to be
Some academic miscreant, given
At last the chance to batter at the walls
Which once contained his ignominious
Boyhood chagrin — puny impotent rage.
Now he'd show them he had learned the skill
To well-direct his anger.

The floors fall
And walls, closets, blackboards, ceilings, fixtures —
The schoolhouse trappings — even furniture
That was left behind too worn, too gouged, too bent,
Or simply old, since new things had been bought
Color-coordinated with the walls
And floors of the new school, built just across
The street, an edifice designed not just
By architects of best-laid blueprints but
Also by an educational con-
Sultant

So here I stand and overlook
The pulverizing of the venerable
Old fortress where my mother undertook
To leave her mother's foreign ways behind;
And here my sister braced her awkward self
For collegiate assignations; and then I
Came after mimicking a scholar's ways.
Here some teachers shook up students' minds
And others — deadwood — beat them into stones
That lay inert or catapulted through
Spiteful violent courses.

The wrecker's ball
Now lays bare the musty fourth floor innards
Of a room not used for years, locked up, roped off.
Two walls are gone and half the tiled floor
Quavers in the wind, releasing squares
Of multi-flecked brown asphalt that drop down
Like flakes into the dusty brick-filled pit
Of the boiler room. The fourth floor blackboard
Emerges from the ruin like a flag
Whose white-chalked letters tell the world at last,
"MISS GREENWALD SUCKS." And nothing else remains.



Tucker Stilley

Dennis Lordan
WHERE DO THEY SLEEP?

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Never gouge your tables or chairs or
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NO RISK of mushing their minds from Video-Television or
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Neutron keeps the kids happy and the *Big* PLUS to Parents?
When you've had enough of their Cries and Clamour, they're out of your hair
With One Quick Push of the Button — no fuss — no muss — no damage to valuable
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So come to the *Pentagon Pet Store* nearest you and
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Don't forget! *Pentagon Pet Stores* are open 24 hours a day to increase
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Who've got Plenty MONEY and
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Because You are power-LESS to stop their MANIACAL PLANS,
WHY NOT JOIN IN THE FUN?
DIAL *PENTAGON PET SHOP* TODAY!
(tomorrow may be too late)

Debbie Le Mieux

OPUS #1: IN THE STREET

Once in New York I watched for a long time
and said nothing as a man collapsed in front of me.
There was nothing to say: other people asked
if he was ill. They asked the man whose eyes were shut,
whose face had flushed a crimson deeper than embarassment,
if they could have his name, or call someone, or get him
a drink. One waved a flask above his lips, and when they
didn't part, brought it to his own. An ambulance arrived.
The men who paled his face with sheets also had nothing to say;
and said nothing.

OPUS #2: IN THE SUBWAY

It's true that in such close confinement
a man can go berserk: I was there, I was the one
he took, the one whose hair he gathered from behind
and pulled, just tight enough to make my neck
snap back, my eyes begin to burn, the skin draw taut
around my face. No tears, there wasn't time. There wasn't
time for anything but what he wanted done. No time
for pity or self-defense, no time to yell for help, no time
but time to think:

What cannot, ever, happen to me, is happening.

W. Wells
HOMAGE TO ROBERTO BELLARMINO (Feb. 17, 1600)

> Quod frater Jordanus male sentit de
> sancta fide catholica contra quam et
> eius ministros obloquutus est . . .

Rome's trembling humanists gawked all the way
while what was left of Bruno lurched and reeled
along the stinking alleys to the Field
where flesh would feed a gaudy flower that day.
The Curia's specialists had sought to sway
him from his heresies with Truth Revealed
and cunning instruments. He would not yield
to these, so they retired awhile, to pray;

and thus inspired, contrived, to end dispute,
a potent closing argument, which smote
his terms awry, to finally confute
his pleas and thwart his fractious urge to quote
"Nihil sub sole . . . "; but could not refute
The premise of that terrible, mute throat.

Anne M. Hudson
SUPPLICANT

A nun sits across from me on the subway,
The pink and grey triangle
  pinched by the habit
  of taking pains.
Her eyes search upward
(Undistracted by my smile).
Does she look for Him or for His Messenger
  bringing at last an answer to petitions
  clasped long in the tidy, roughened hands?

Norma J. Reppucci
POINSETTIAS

The branches
reach out,
weighed down
by the scarlet bracts.

Senses we possess
are useless
when they bloomed
in the dark.

We must know
subtler feelings
to explain their art.

Norma J. Reppucci
MOSES SONG

I'll never see the promised land
because I struck the rock twice,
I struck the rock twice.
Others follow the light
after they've seen a glimpse.
I've held the torch and looked

into the Lion's eyes and still
I wander forty days
and forty nights,
trying to find a wilderness
that will succor me
from pure intention.

Jesus went into the desert
to face himself
not the devil.
Jesus went into the calm
to learn to love
himself not his power.

FICTION

MJ King

The Dead Man's Message

Uchendu Benji Eze

The sky was overcast and at intervals thunder rumbled across the Eastern periphery. Toads were hopping about and croaking on the farms. The birds ceased their singing and some were flapping their wings furiously, heading home. Farmers were hurrying home, too. Some road on bicycles; others were half walking and half running.

Nnadi sat stiffly on his bicycle. He was well over seventy and was noted for not looking sideways whenever he was riding. He wore a pair of baggy, tweed trousers with many patches at the knee caps, the very type comic villagers refer to as dog-bite-me-not. Over this hung his brown, khaki shirt; and a large straw hat spread out above his head like the halo of a holy angel.

A long basket was secured onto the carrier of his bicycle. At one corner of the basket was placed a calabash of the palm wine he tapped that evening, carefully protected with dried banana leaves. At the other end were two big hoes, four knives of various sizes and a shovel with a broken handle. In the middle of the basket were two plates, a small aluminum pot and a large plastic bottle. As he passed along, these items rattled against each other; and he was whistling his favorite folk song with apparent contentment.

He was getting close to the village when it began to drizzle; and he was trying hard to reach home before the rain became heavy. As he was about to cross the intersection of the tarred road that ran across the village, he heard the sudden blare of a horn. He turned his bicycle furiously and fell into a nearby culvert. The car shot past, stopped, then backed up. The driver came out and helped him to rise.

"Look at," Nnadi shouted fixing his eyes on the broken calabash and the wine that spilled around. "It is not the lost wine that bothers me, it is the calabash. "Oh, — ," he mumbled. The man helped him to gather his belongings that scattered all around. Then he felt his breast pocket for his snuff box and discovered it was not there. He looked around and found the small bottle broken. "Oh," he cried, "with what then am I to bear this agony! Eh? My calabash broken, my wine lost, my snuff box broken, my snuff lost! Who will give me the snuff to endure all this with? And how do I go about under this rain to find that person?" The pain that spread over his face deepened the wrinkles across his forehead.

"Nnanyi," said the driver of the car, "you should first thank God that you are alive."

"I thank Him. But I am worried to live without wine and snuff."

"But neither of these is food. One can survive without them."

"Young man," replied Nnandi, "don't sermonise. I understand life better than you. Food is food, wine is wine and snuff is snuff. Each has its part in life."

"And the essence of drinking is to be drunk."

"No, hold it, let me tell you. Drunkenness is surely bad. Yet to say of a man that he is never drunk is not a virtue. When I was your age, I used to get drunk once in a while and give my wife some advantages. And whenever I get her tipsy with wine, man, I would see what fire there is in young blood. But I am now done with such. And take note, men who are always sober — those who are said to be wise — make bad husbands. They worry themselves so much and antagonise their households."

"Oh, is that blood from your nose?" the young man asked. It was then Nnadi touched his nose and realized that he had sustained a very slight injury at the tip of his nose.

"Oho," he lamented, "it is not only one thing that happened to me. Never has it ever been one thing happening to

me. Witness this one. I was even worrying about how to get snuff, not knowing that I haven't got the nose for it. Look at this. I had gone to work all day in order to get food and nourish my blood. See that blood gushing out of my body?" Saying so he put out his hands and continued, "Look at this. Look at the world where you want to tell me there is no need for wine and snuff. Hm — perhaps you are one of the lucky few. If I tell you what happened the first day I was really drunk you will go home and drink and be drunk for seven days."

"Alright. Take care. I am in a haste. Have this." And he held out a naira note for Nnadi.

"Sympathy? No, I don't need it. Life and I are a couple. What you just see is our fireplace romance. You have not seen our bedroom fight. I have been used to it all."

"I know. But, please, take it from me."

"Thank you," said Nnadi placing one hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Thank you, dẹar. But keep it. I know you are sympathizing with me and I thank you for that. It shows you are human." What I need badly is to talk to you. But since you are in a haste, I will not delay you. Visit me whenever you have the chance. I will give you one or two words you'll pass over to younger generations. Maybe after talking to you my heart will be open to receive a thousand naira from you."

"OK, when do you want me to come?"

"I know you are very busy. Why don't we fix it for Sunday, or won't you have the chance?"

"Sunday? That's four days from today. That's good for me. And where do you live?"

"Just across this road. Do you see that pear tree?"

"Yes."

"It is in front of my house."

"Alright I will come at ten o'clock in the morning. Is it a good time for you?"

"I need to talk to you more than I need anything else. I will wait for you all day."

"And may I know your name?"

"Nnadi Okoro."

"I am Simon Obi. Alright, I will see you on Sunday. Take care. Good night."

"God be with you."

Nnadi reached his house, a thatched mud dwelling with little ventilation where he and his grandson, Alphonso, lived. The eight-year old boy had gone to the mission for catechism in preparation for his first Holy Communion. Soon after, he came home, thoroughly drenched. They discussed what to eat and decided on taking tea and bread. That was the boy's favorite, and for his grandfather, he was not in the spirit to belabor himself cooking anything else.

As they were taking their supper, Nnadi told the small boy what happened.

"Nna." said he, "when will this type of problem stop falling on to you? Is it when you get money and use jerry cans instead of calabashes for your wine? And maybe then you will own your own car."

"No, my boy, the same problem will come in another form. But for every person it will be over some day."

"Which day is it?"

"The very day he is put into a casket and buried."

"And then that person will go to either heaven or hell."

"Hm — You know, I am not a churchman. All I know is that I sustained injury this evening, lost my calabash, my wine, my snuff box and my snuff. If the wine was here now, I would have given you a cup this evening and tomorrow we could have sold some to get money. Is that not so?"

"It is."

"So drink my tea and tell me, thank you." As usual they slept on a bamboo bed close to the fireplace in one of the two rooms. At intervals that night, Nnadi woke the boy to stir up the fire.

At one time he complained that his joints and spine were paining him. In the morning he could hardly get up. Two days later, his breath was coming in gasps. He was breathing heavily and coughing intermittently. The medicine the boy bought him from the druggist was useless.

After building up the fire a second time, on Saturday night, Alphonso fell asleep. He was not aroused again and only awoke at daybreak.

"Nna, Nna," he called, "won't you go to tap this morning?" There was no response. He shook the body beside him and once he left it, it remained still.

He looked into the old man's face and saw the lifeless eyes staring at him. Fear gripped him and he ran to a neighbor crying.

The carpenter was about nailing the lid of the coffin onto it for interment when a young man made his way through the mourners, looked at the face in the coffin and threw himself at it crying. Nobody knew who he was nor why he cried with such deep emotion.

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or Syrian Bread

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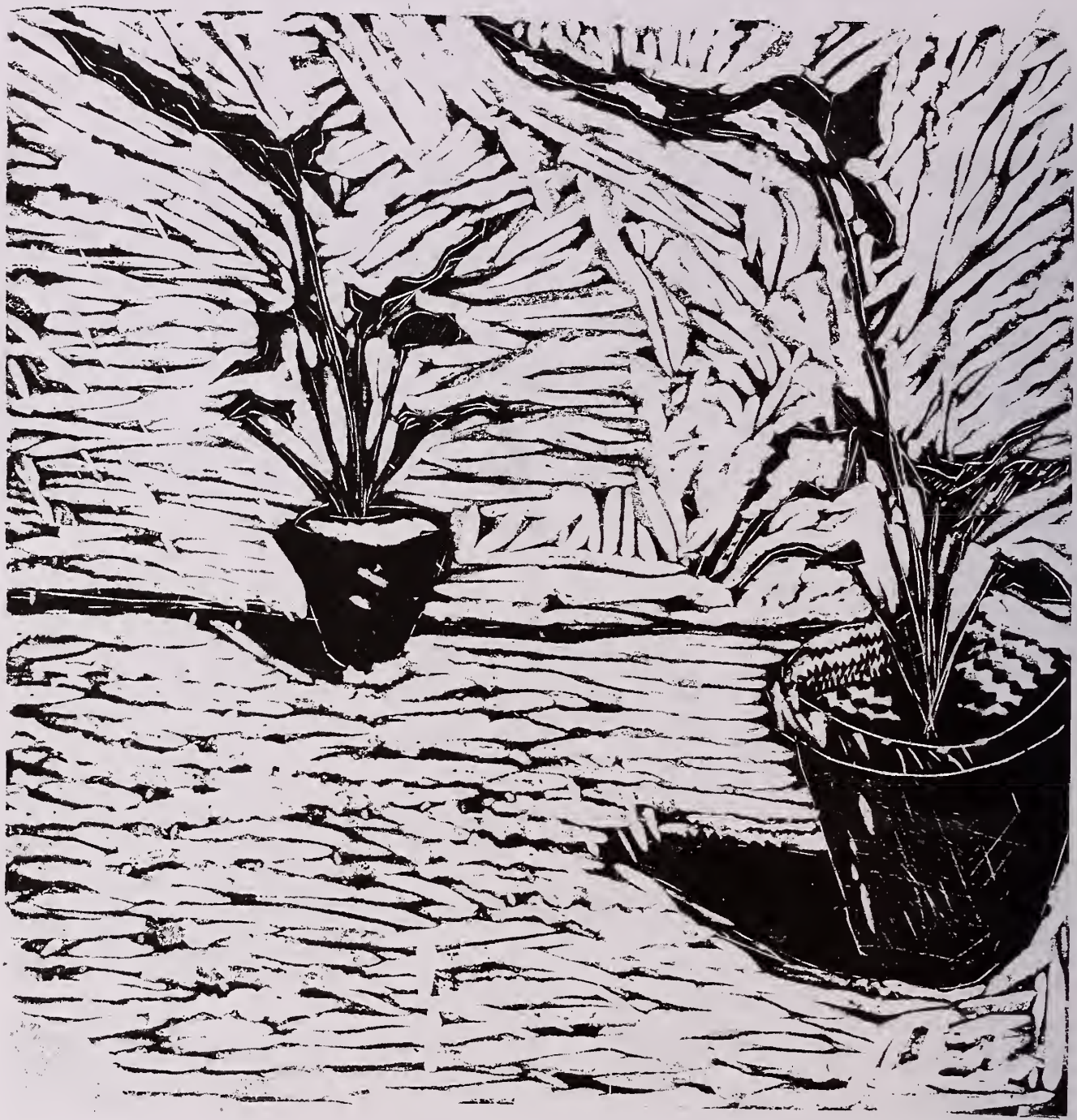


Renee Scot Kildow

The Fruit Tree

Batia Gadassi

It is not a very long story. It took no time. I had not even had the pleasure of deciding. I operated as if under a spell. An invisible criminal was forcing me without words to kill. I bought poison. In fact, I shopped madly for poisons of all sorts. I was amazed how many poisons are available and within reach. For some time it seemed I was delaying the killing with the meek excuse that I must find the correct potion and wait for the right time. But in fact I was only waiting to prolong the pleasure.

I had grown that sophisticated, finally — sophisticated enough to realize the tyranny which had caused my youth to be forgotten. Finally, I was ready to disobey all that I had followed for years. Time had passed, and I had become one of those creatures, one of those women who by having forgotten the laws were no longer even aware that they could defend themselves. I had nearly forgotten my dreams. But I had dreams; I just could not remember them. I do remember a blue dress. It was not completely blue, but had a pattern of blue squares organized in small groups over white. It fitted my body, which had just ripened perfectly. I was seventeen; you were four then.

I was beautiful. He was too. He did not come for me; he had sent for me. He was traditional; he made love to my parents first. In no time, he had won everyone's approval, approval at first sight, you might say. With such an image he could get away with murder.

He used to take me for walks before we married — romantic, you'd think. He always had a blanket with him, so he could suddenly throw me in the grass somewhere. I should have known better then, but instead I almost enjoyed it. I had noticed then that he had more compassion for the grass, which had been crushed underneath us, than for me crushed underneath him.

We had taken a taxi the next day, after we had gotten married, and drove here. Daddy brought you along too, but only to stay a short while. You left that day, after Daddy had planted trees in back of the old house, trees like the ones we had back home — plums grapes, figs, and even bananas. But the trees died one by one or bore no fruit. We were pioneers and there were only twelve couples. Soon the wars came. The first one was the toughest. The babies were small, and I was frightened to death. I though of mother giving birth on her knees, I had remembered Grandpa's blindness and how Joseph was killed. But nothing helped — I felt sorry for myself. The village was so isolated. Nights were so dark. One never knew what could happen. I listened to the news and read books. I had fears natural to that world. I had never wanted to come here. I was brought here by this caveman to bear children and keep house. Do not look at me like that. I am not bitter! I am not even upset! And what's more, I'll tell you, I am quite happy! No one knows it, but it's true. It is a secret for the strangest reason — because no one cares. Just keep this in mind and listen carefully.

You know I had been reading books. Well, they have not taught me anything. They never quite hit the truth. Anyway, it was not from them that I got the idea, but from a dream. I got the poison and poured it into the ground. For a long time it seemed as if nothing was happening, but then the tree became dry and ill-looking. Still, one could think it was the heat.

I had started looking for him, anticipating his home-comings. It was magical. I watched him come home. From half a mile away, he had noticed that the tree was ill. He never ran except in battle; but his walk, though steady and unhurried, was anticipating horror. It was just about dawn. The light was dim, yet he looked bright red. Like a dancer he crossed the field and as if in slow motion, he swallowed the sight with his eyes. I watched him through the kitchen window while leaning over the sink. I knew that as always he did not see me. I was in his blind spot. He leaned over the sapling and touched it tenderly, examining it like a comrade at war attending a wounded friend. Blood rushed into my head. I knew then that his heart was breaking, and with guilt on one hand and compassion on the other, I somehow knew I was happy.

I poured different poisons into the ground daily. Every sunset I'd be watching him come home to the dying tree, trying to save it from what he believed to be fate. It was awesome to me that it never crossed his mind that I had anything to do with it. Day after day I'd see him crossing the field coming back from work. Sometimes the sight became unreal, and I saw fires and smoke behind him. Sometimes his silhouette would appear moving out of or running into the sun. He seemed feverish, and I would hold my forehead and realize that I felt the same. (He had started to wilt, but things had to go on (as planned). He knew he was losing but he had to continue his efforts to save the tree. The watering, the new soil, the wind and sun shelter, the medicines were all in vain. The dead plant was finally encaged in a bizarre construction that looked like a pagan altar or strange scarecrow covered with a blanket and bandaged up. "Someone is going out of his mind," I thought to myself. But it is over now. Only a small hole was left in the ground. Filled with fresh red soil, it seemed like a huge blood drop staining the green of the field.

That day, the day he had dug it out, I heard him enter the house. He left the door open and disappeared into the bathroom. I sat where we are now. The doorway framed the sun as it rolled away burning red. I stared at it until it disappeared. I got up and closed the door as he entered the dining room. Dinner was ready; I waited for him. He started handling the food with his fork but could not start. "One thing," he said to me with beaten anger, "the apple tree is gone. You might as well know it now. Please don't tell me that you knew it was going to happen." He started to eat but then uttered with his mouth full, "and please don't tell me how happy it makes you." I got up to put water on the stove for coffee. The outside darkness penetrated into the kitchen. It came to my mind that the coffee smelled like coffee always does, and that we too would never change.

Dave Parziale

Cousin Max

Arthur Lipkin

My father has in the last five years developed a friendship with a cousin of his named Max. All through their working lives they hardly saw each other. Perhaps they said hello at a funeral or sat near each other at a wedding reception. Since Max's wife, Irene, died, however, things have been different. Max and my father are both retired and my mother still works so the two men have had the opportunity to do things together.

My father talks on the telephone with Max for longer than he ever talked to anyone on the phone before. I have eavesdropped on fragments of my father's end of the conversation and am almost tempted to call it gossip, except that it's hard for me to put "gossip" and Dad in the same sentence, thinking of him as I do as a no-nonsense kind of guy. In fact, I can remember his telling me during my long-winded adolescent phone call days that I sounded like an old woman. Well, the biddies have come home to roost.

In addition to phone calls, Dad and Max have met in Boston stores to look around. My father's Depression mentality prohibits him from calling it shopping when he doesn't have anything he really needs to buy. I can just picture him and Max inspecting a shirt in Filene's Basement or a pair of shoes at Jordan's. They could easily spend fifteen minutes peering through the plastic wrap to inspect the stitching or trying to decide if Kush-Sole Shoes are made in Korea.

Max has complained to me that my father will never eat lunch on one of their trips. I think he once consented to have a cup of coffee in a doughnut shop, but restaurant prices are "outrageous" he says, not to mention my mother's admonitions about his weight. Max is always trying to get Dad to have a Chinese lunch at a particular restaurant in Chinatown but has met with no success.

One Saturday a few weeks ago Dad called on the telephone. "Hello, Hal?" he said.

"Yes, Dad, how are you? Mum said you had a little cold."

"It's worse."

"Oh, too bad. Where is it? In your chest?"

"It has been in my head but now it's in my chest too."

"Ugh. Can I do anything for you? Do you need anything?"

"No thanks. I'm just taking aspirin and I've got some Robitussin too. But listen, what are you doing this afternoon?"

I thought he wanted company so I answered, "Nothing special. Want some company for a few hours? Does Mum work till four?"

"Yes, but I can manage. I'm not staying in bed. No, listen. I was supposed to go to Boston with Max today just to shmooze around. He's looking for a vaccum cleaner. I told him we had one he could have. You know that Electrolux . . .

"The one that Joan gave you?"

"Ya."

"Dad, that thing didn't work right. That's why she gave it to you. I tried using it once."

"It works well enough. Do you know how much they want for one of those things now?"

"I can imagine."

"A couple a hundred bucks."

I pretended surprise. "Jesus, that much? So, is Max going to take it?"

"He might, but he wants to look at some Hoovers downtown. I told him I wasn't feeling well but that I'd ask you to go with him. He doesn't want to go alone."

"Me? What have I got in common with Max?"

"He is your cousin. You've never really spent any time with him. Whenever we've had him over here for dinner you've just breezed in and out."

"To be perfectly honest, dad, Max is a prize-winning bore."

"You think you're above him and me?"

"That's not the issue."

"Well, I haven't seen you warming any chairs in your parents' house lately."

"Is that what you really want to talk about?"

"I don't know. You used to tell me everything."

"And now I'm more selective about which burdens I share with you. Isn't that what growing up is all about?"

"I just didn't expect that from you. From Joan yes. She never confided in me. But not from you."

"Dad, I'm lucky enough to have good friends I can lay my stuff on. Why worry you and Mum?"

"I see," he said.

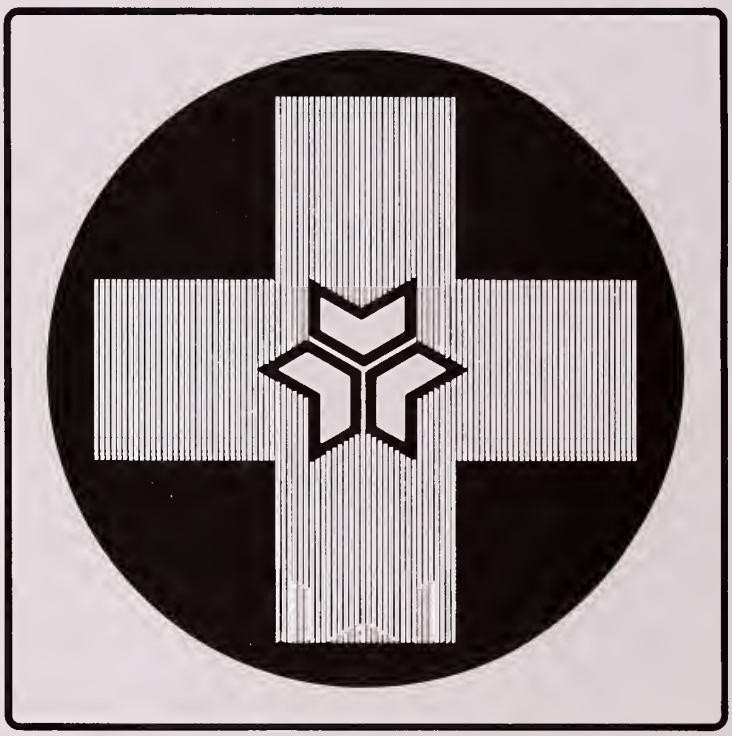
As much to change the subject as to humor him, I agreed to spend a few hours with Max that afternoon. Dad asked me not to prejudge Max, to give him a chance, that I really didn't know him.

And I must say Dad was right. I really hadn't known Max. I met him at my parents' house and we drove to Central Square in Cambridge where we parked and took the T downtown. Max said that would be cheaper than paying for parking in Boston. He and my father were cut from the same cloth, that's for sure.

He drove very slowly, sitting forward in his seat and hunching over the steering wheel. I tried to make small talk but it was useless trying to speak to him while he was driving, so I gave up and just watched. I was fascinated by his resemblance to my grandfather who died fifteen years ago at eighty-seven. He had the same nose and facial bone structure: a very large forehead, and prominent jaw and teeth. My father might look like that eventually. Max is ten years older than Dad.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH . . .

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICE



Harbor Campus

Adm. Bldg., 2nd Fl.

David L. Stockton
Executive Director
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Ass't. to Exec. Dir.
Medical Services
Gynecology
Laboratory
Business Office
Info./App't. Desk
929-7111

Mental Health/Couns.
929-7170

Building 020

Health Promotion
929-7880
Emer. Care Training
929-7882

Downtown Campus

100 Arl. Street
Boston, MA 02116

Mezzanine Level

Medical Services
956-1017

Fourth Floor, Rm. 417

Counseling Service
956-1024

Huntington Campus

625 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02115

Gym Bldg., Rm. 305

Medical Services
731-3300, ×369

—APRIL IS HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH—

On the train I got my chance to make conversation. "My father reminded me that you sold him the storm windows for his house."

"Yes. Yes, I did," he said. He had Grandpa's habit of darting his eyes everywhere when he spoke to you.

"But don't I remember from when I was little that you were an optometrist?"

"I did that. I graduated from optometry school, but in those days you couldn't make much of a living at that. Not like today. They're getting a fortune."

"I know those designer frames can be expensive."

"Designer frames, tinted lenses. I remember when 'rose colored glasses' was a joke. Now they want them in every color."

"Why don't you open a little business, Max?"

"Oh no no no. Not at my age, Hal. No, I couldn't do that."

"So you went into the storm window business instead?"

"Just windows. First it was just windows. Later on they had storm windows. Have you ever heard of Apex Glass?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, they're not in business any more. But they were a big company. I worked for them for twenty years until they folded. Then the last six years until I retired I worked for Samuelson." Max had a way of holding his breath when he spoke. He pursed his lips and let out sentences in gushes. And his pale white hands were busy on his thighs while his eyes jumped from person to person on the train.

"And have you always lived in Brighton?" I asked.

"No, Irene and I. . . . Irene was my wife. She passed away five years ago." I didn't know why he thought he had to explain to me who Irene was, but I said nothing. "Irene and I had an apartment in Brookline. A very nice place. It was a little crowded though. Her brothers lived with us, you see. But it was a very nice apartment. It was one of the first buildings to put a laundry in the basement."

My mother had told me the story of Max and the brothers-in-law. Irene's two brothers had moved in with them a few years after they got married. One had been injured in World War II. They were both marginally employed and did absolutely nothing around the house. Irene was an overweight princess and Max did all the cooking and laundry.

"Where are your brothers-in-law living now? They're not still with you?"

"No. I got an apartment in Elderly Housing: Laurel Project in Brighton. It's just a one bedroom. That's all they have there. Ralph and Izzy are still in the apartment in Brookline. They're on the waiting list at Laurel. But you know something?" He leaned close to me, taking my arm and whispering, "It's nice to be alone for a little while."

"I think you deserve it, Max."

"But the other two . . . they have a hard time managing on their own. When they move into Laurel I'll be able to give them a hand." He looked very serious. "They miss Irene."

"From what my mother has told me they probably miss you too," I said.

"Do you think so? I suppose they do." Irene and Max never had children.

After checking out vacuum cleaners and attachments for an hour, I was ready to move on to neckties or even socks for a change of ambiance. But Max had just a few more questions for the salesman at Jordan's. "And what did you say this attachment was for?" he asked the short, mustached, patiently anorexic man.

"For drapes. For cleaning drapes," the man said. And he took the nozzle from Max and moved it up and down in the air as if scraping the dust off an imaginary curtain. He had as urgent a need for us to move on as I did.

"Well, I don't need that," Max said flatly. "I've got venetian blinds in my apartment — no drapes."

"Yes, well, as I said, the attachments for the Hoover come together in one package. You can't buy them separately."

"That's too bad," Max said shaking his head.

"You can give it away to a friend who has drapes," suggested the salesman, brightening a bit.

"No. That won't do," muttered Max. The salesman turned away, still holding the attachment, and went to help someone else.

Max whispered to me, "I didn't want to insult him, but what if none of my friends has a Hoover?"

"You're right, Max," I said. "Is that it, then? Have we seen enough for you to make a decision?"

"Oh yes, I've seen enough. I'll think it over. You know, your father offered to give me one of his that he doesn't use."

"The Electrolux."

"Right. But I'd feel funny accepting a gift from him."

"Is there anything else you want to look at, Max? Do you need any shirts?"

"No, I'm all set. Unless there's something you'd like to look for while we're here?"

"I don't need a thing right now. So it's back to Cambridge, then?"

"Wait a minute, Harold. You're not getting off that easy with me. Your father told me how much you like Chinese food. He never comes with me to Mai Ling's, but he was sure you'd like to go."

If I could have strangled my father on the spot with a lo mein noodle I'd have done so. "Thanks, Max, I'm not sure I'm that hungry right now . . ."

"Nonsense, a boy your age can always eat. It's my treat," he said, patting me on the back.

"Have you made up your mind?" asked the salesman returning.

"Not today, thank you very much," Max answered and motioned me to precede him toward the exit.

Chinatown is a short walk from the shopping district and Indian Summer was in full glow so we took a leisurely pace.

"I've tried to get your father to have lunch with me a dozen times," Max said on the way.

"He and my mother don't like to eat out," I said.

"I know. It's one luxury I allow myself, though. I used to do all the cooking at home. Irene didn't go much for cooking. Now that I'm on my own I like to eat out twice a week. One lunch and one supper." He looked at his watch. "I don't know what to call this."

"Call what?" I asked.

"This meal," he answered. "I didn't eat anything but breakfast today. But it's after lunchtime now so I guess I'll call it supper."

I feared I'd end up calling it sleep.

We passed a rather dull-looking place called the Jade Pagoda. "I used to work there," Max said matter-of-factly.

"Where? In that restaurant?" I asked surprised.

"Ya," Max said, inhaling the syllable whistfully.

"What was it then?" I asked, assuming it had been some business other than a restaurant.

"Ruby Wong's," he replied. I stopped walking and turned to him.

"You worked in a Chinese restaurant?" I asked in an astounded pitch. I guessed wildly that he must have been the maitre d' or cashier but I was afraid to say something just in case he'd been a waiter.

He was amused by my amazement and said nothing for a few seconds. He had unintentionally created a mystery for me and seemed to enjoy the suspense. It was hardly a characteristic position for him to be in.

He grinned. "I used to play the fiddle in there."

"The fiddle . . . In a Chinese restaurant?" I thought he meant he used to walk around among the tables playing gypsy melodies. "Don't they just do that in goulash restaurants?"

"We played dance music. There was a piano, a clarinet and sax man, and a drummer."

"Did they have a dancefloor?" I asked stupidly. I had not moved an inch from where I had stopped.

"Sure there was a dance floor," Max said. "Not a big one like at the Bradford, but I would say a dozen couples could dance. . . . You know who used to play piano with us for a couple of years?"

"Who?" I was so surprised by the whole revelation I would have accepted anyone short of Ellington.

"Eddie Duchin."

I remembered the movie of Eddie Duchin's life with Tyrone Power and Kim Novack. "No kidding, Max?" I said. "I never even knew you used to be a musician. Or are you still? My father never mentioned it."

"I still take my fiddle out every now and then and play. La vie en Rose, That Ole Black Magic. Da da dadada da da dadadada." He hummed. and even swayed a bit with his eyes closed. He was not the least like my grandfather now.

"Let's have lunch here," I suggested whimsicly.

"Here?" Max asked. "At the . . . " He read the sign.". . . the Jade Pagoda. I don't know anything about the place now. What if it isn't any good?"

"We'll take our chances. If it's delicious I'll let you pay, Max. And if it turns out to be terrible let me pay."

"Nono, I'll pay whatever it is," he said dubiously. "I wonder what it's like in there now. Look, it isn't even the same restaurant really. Ruby Wong's took up the whole building. And now they've divided it up into two stores. This place is only half the size of Ruby's. And what's in there?" He pointed to the other store.

I peered into a plate glass window that was almost totally obstructed on the other side by yardgoods and cardboard boxes. An elderly Chinese woman sat at a large heavy-legged table covered with bolts of cloth. She ate a hardboiled egg. A sign behind the doorglass read "closed". "I think it's some kind of textile company," I said. Max looked apprehensive. "Come on, Max, let's have lunch."

We went into the Jade Pagoda. We were the only customers in the place. I hoped it was the hour. A young girl with a broken pencil stuck behind her ear led us to a table. It was black formica, wiped so often it had a greyish patina. The girl brought us a pot of tea and menus.

"It's awfully dark in here," Max said. "I can hardly see the menu."

"Why don't you just order what you used to eat at Ruby Wong's," I said.

"Do you suppose they still have those things?"

"Were they that exotic?" I asked.

"No. I suppose not. Ah, Miss." He waved at the girl and she came to the table. "Can we have an order of egg roll. I'm sure they still have those," he said to me chuckling. The girl was bored. "And do you have shrimp with lobster sauce?"

"Shrimp with lobster sauce, yes," she said. She didn't write anything down. I thought that was fortuitous, having looked at her pencil earlier.

"And how about. . . . ah . . . subgum chow mein?" Max asked.

"Yes, we have," the girl answered.

"Then one order of subgum chow mein," Max said.

"Yes, I have . . . one order subgum chow mein. Anything else?"

"Some steamed rice. Or would you prefer fried?" he asked me.

"Whatever you like, Max," I said.

"Steamed rice then. For two." The girl disappeared through a set of swinging doors into the kitchen. "We never had fried rice when we played here." He lowered his voice. "It used to repeat on the clarinet player."

I laughed. "I suppose it could be a drag trying to play clarinet and belch at the same time." Then I wasn't sure if I was being too unsubtle for Max. "So how has the place changed?" I asked.

"It's so dark in here it's hard to tell. Well, the bandstand . . ." He turned around in his seat. ". . . used to be over there. But there's a wall so close now. That wall would have divided the bandstand in two. And the dance floor extended out from there to about where we're sitting." The girl came out of the kitchen. She had no food with her and just went back to the desk at the front entrance. "You don't get much light from these lamps," Max said examining the black plastic lantern with red tassels that adorned our table. "Forty years ago, they had a chandellier that could light up the whole place. Of course they kept it low for the atmosphere."

"Or to keep people from seeing what they were eating," I joked.

"Oh no, not Ruby Wong," Max protested. "He served nothing but the best. Mayor Curley used to bring friends here after the theater."

"Did he pay?" I asked sarcastically.

"You sound just like your father, Harold."

"Well do you know? Did Curley pay?"

"Of course he didn't pay. But you had to keep on the good side of the pols, you know. He did Ruby a favor on his liquor licence."

"I bet."

"You had to have liquor if you expected to make money."

"You must have seen a lot of interesting escapades from up on the bandstand, Max, huh?"

"Not much. This was a high class place. I do remember one time the daughter of some politician tried to dance with her colored boyfriend and that caused quite a stir."

The waitress suddenly appeared with our eggroll. We began to eat. It wasn't bad. She came back with duck sauce and hot mustard. "My father used to say this stuff could clear out your sinuses better than nose drops," I quipped. "This is good eggroll, Max."

And so was the rest of meal. They even had sesame candy for desert instead of the *pro forma* fortune cookie. "This candy takes me back to the old days," Max said.

"I don't suppose the clarinet player could eat any of this gummy stuff either, could he Max?"

"That I don't remember." He laughed. "I don't know what it will do for my dentures for that matter."

"Aren't you glad I convinced you to come in here?"

"Yes I am. You know I met Irene while I was working in here. She came in one night with Izzy. He was leaving for the war the next day. She brought him here for a farewell. They danced and she caught my eye. I had no idea he was her brother. I was embarassed."

"Did you talk to her that night?"

"We had a little break and I walked by her table. Izzy was in the Men's Room and she stopped me. We talked for just a minute. I didn't want to cause any trouble when Izzy came back. But when he did she introduced him as her brother and I was so relieved."

We both laughed. Max insisted on paying the check but I prevailed on him to let me leave the tip. When we were out on the sidewalk I thanked him. "And not just for the good meal," I said, "but for the stories too. I had no idea you had such a colorful past, Max." I regretted the phrasing. I seemed to be implying exactly what I thought: that he had turned out to be a dull fogie.

"If you think *my* past is interesting what about your father's?" he asked

with a sparkle in his eye.

"What about Dad's past?" I asked.

"Oh . . . for instance, his trip to Florida in '36 and his job down there at the race track."

"Race track? I knew he went to Florida around then, but I never asked what he did there. I always assumed he just worked in a drugstore or something. Isn't that dumb?"

"No, Hal. He didn't even study pharmacy until he came back from Florida. Ask him to tell you about the racetrack. Or about Boothby's store in West Roxbury. That's another one." He raised his eyebrows. "Do you know about it?"

"I'm afraid not," I said. "I guess I missed out on that one too."

Max put his arm around my shoulder. His white hand brushed my chin. "There are probably a lot of things your father would tell you about once you got him started like you did to me today. It doesn't take too much to bring back the past when you get to be our age."

I felt a sudden rush of warmth for "boring" old Max and put my arm around him. We walked for a few yards like old war buddies. "Let him tell you about Mrs. Boothby," Max said.

"Sounds like an intriguing place to start, Max," I said. We to the Washington T stop to catch the train back to Cambridge.

The Club

Abigail Hope

Mrs. Trainer, whom I had always assumed to be widowed, was, it appeared, merely long-divorced. She was to be joined at the club by her ex-husband and her two sons.

The younger son, Don, was well-known to us, dutifully appearing each Sunday to escort his mother to brunch as he did, and frequently hanging uselessly about the front office. It was as though he had no place else to go, a circumstance I've seldom observed of young men of his class, and sought to amuse himself by lighting, wraith-like, upon the corner red velvet wing chair and clumsily attempting conversation while I, needless to say, proceeded with some current tabulation, or tried discreetly to eat my brought dinner. Invariably, if he were about, he would ask where I had bought my sandwich, or single out some particular item. "That peach looks good," he might say, simply, and hungrily as it seemed to me. I never offered him any of my dinner, though I did feel a bit sorry for him.

Don lived in a furnished studio apartment across the river, that his mother rented by the week for him, and the prospect my mind had constructed of this was anything but homey; but what, after all, could Don hope to find here? Established in 1909 by the wealthy wives of the members of a nearby men's club, the club had thrived, its membership swelling until it was necessary to purchase the Federal mansion overlooking the Commons to house them all. Even in those days, when our membership consisted of a thousand of Boston's wealthiest, most socially, charitably and politically inclined women, it would be difficult to discern a place here for one of Don's age and gender. Today, Don's presence made even less sense. Our membership has shrunk to about 250, and its character, and the character of the club, has changed. The truly wealthy woman of the late twentieth century no longer gravitates to city clubs, but, as I imagine, sequesters herself instead within the armed camp of a large estate. So we have lost most of the descendants of our founders, except for a few still clinging pale orchids whose air-roots gasp and starve in the chinks of the crumbling aristocracy. Our admission procedure is now democratic to a degree; for our board of directors will admit any woman at all, so long as she is able to pay the annual membership fee. What are we today, but a foothold in the swift and fruitless climb toward respectability of a legion of saleswomen and computer technicians?

To its members the club provides the aura, impregnably solid, (albeit unreal) of Old Money. People hold functions, business meetings and weddings here, or eat elegant meals, or stay overnight in guest rooms, and then go home. To some eight women, both young and old, though, the club is home, and it is they and not the shallow-seeing eyes of transient visitors who see the peeling paint, stained upholstery and empty spaces where certain stolid, antique pieces of furniture once stood, that have now been sold. It is they that shiver in their beds on winter weekends when the management is conserving heat.

Frail Miss Small is our most ancient resident, and it was she who told me about the times of the club's vigor. She and Mrs. Trainer tend to take care of one another, and when I first arrived here I would see them always together, going out and coming in, checking each other's mailboxes and so on, so that their age and friendship compelled me to think of them as a pair of weird sisters. (Of late,) though, they do not go about together so often as they were used to do, and I fear that perhaps Mrs. Trainer's drinking has caused Miss Small some embarrassment.

I don't know why the younger women stay here. Whatever their reasons, there are several who do, maintaining this exclusive address and continuing a style of life that can no longer exist in most parts of this country. In any case, there are nights when the house holds only the eight residents and me, or Hutton, the night man, and then we rattle about like the unwanted relics of a disbanded museum whose more precious collections have all been distributed.

Mrs. Trainer had, over the years since I had been working at the club, eased into discussing her problem son's failings with me. She would come down in the evenings dressed in rich

Glen Gurner

tweeds and ask me to call a cab for her. I would make the call, and then while she waited she would chat with me. "You went to B.U., didn't you, Miss Smith?"

I hadn't, and she never could remember exactly where I had taken my degree. "No, Mrs. Trainer, I went to the University of Massachusetts."

"And you were an English major?"

"I majored in business."

"Did you? Perhaps you would know if they have a program that Donald might be interested in. Not a remedial program, just something that could give him the extra attention he needs to get himself going."

I tried to be helpful. "There is the Freshman Studies program. Of course, he wouldn't be entering as a Freshman." Then her taxi would pull up and she would stub out her cigarette and put on her coat.

"Oh! There's my cab. Would you write down the name of the person who runs it for me? Thank you, dear. Just leave it in my box."

"Have a pleasant evening, Mrs. Trainer." And she would be gone. Don had been to several small, private colleges on beautiful rural campuses. His mother had told me that he had just never made up his mind as to what interested him. "Poor, poor Don," she would say. "I think he sees himself as a failure." It was hard for me to know how to respond to these confessions. I would say nothing, or I would remind her how sweet he was.

"Oh, yes, he's a sweet boy. Very sweet," his mother would rejoin.

Certainly none of the other members ever confided in me to any extent. Mrs. Trainer, and her family too, for that matter, lacked discretion. It was odd of her, but while a model club woman in many ways, Mrs. Trainer had her eccentricities. Her drinking was one, but I, and most of those who knew her, I think, would generally overlook this because of her masterly, civil manner. It was, you see, not when she was in her cups that she despaired of poor Don; it was when she was sober as a stone. She had never even mentioned the other son, so that when he appeared it seemed reasonable to suppose that his disabilities exceeded even Don's.

For that reason I was quite pleased for his mother when he carried it all off so well Saturday afternoon. He was not at all abashed by our rather impressive lobby, but crossed the gleaming marble checkerboard (upon which, at night when it is freshly waxed and I am quite sure that I am alone on the first floor, I occasionally like to take off my shoes and skate about) as though he had been there before, to introduce himself to me in preparatory school accents and clasp my hand firmly. His mother drew him down the hall and up the steeply spiraling staircase to her rooms.

I informed Don of his brother's arrival when he slouched in a couple of hours later. Instead of hastening up to greet him, Don sat upon the edge of his customary chair and began rustling through the pages of an old *Time* magazine. "Have you met Doug?" he asked me. That's the way he was, you see. Of course I had met his brother. I had just told him he was there, hadn't I?

"Yes, Don," I said.

"What did he look like?"

I stared. His brother looked much like him, but healthier, larger, handsomer, more prosperous altogether. I couldn't tell him that.

"Well," Don pursued, "how was he dressed?"

"Ahh, he looked very nice, . . . he had on a blazer. . . ." Don's questions often had this stuttering effect on my conversation, on me, who always knew the right thing to say.

"He's the King of the Preps, isn't he?"

Don, too, was expensively dressed, but on his body the clothes seemed to rumple and strain. I had to say something. "If he's the King of the Preps, then who are you?"

"Me? Me?" He stood then and wandered off. I thought he had finally gone upstairs, but he had only gone to the men's washroom and came right back to haunt me. I wished he would go, but instead, he sat, and so, ignoring him, I filled out the night's occupancy report and after a while he went upstairs.

Mr. Trainer was due the next morning. The other three shortly came down (obviously they had been waiting for Don), and I called a cab to take them away to dinner. I had finished my work, but still I sat on. I slipped off my shoes and cleared my paperwork from my desk. I leaned back in my armless chair and stared at my many-paned window which still holds three squares of the original amethyst colored glass. It was dark outside, and so I could see no further. Instead I recalled Don's face, so often illumined for me within that same frame.

He wore his pale hair in curls, pushed back off his brow, and his skin was milky with rosy cheeks like a child's. But his cheek-bones and forehead that pushed through that skin, were unchildlike and his nose and chin were sharp and angular. His brow was already creased and one night when he had sat, lit harshly by a lamp on a low table, I saw that he looked like an old man. Yes, he looked sometimes like something prematurely aged, but in some of the most basic ways he had never grown up. And yet, there was a time when I had thought . . . but no.

I did go off my post then, and I heard about the events of the evening only from Hutton when I relieved him the next morning.

At first I thought Don was the perpetrator. I was mistaken in that. I pushed the foreign image of don, drunk, from my mind so that I would hear the rest. They had "practically staggered upstairs." An hour or so later Hutton heard "one of the girls screaming like the devil was after her." He imitated a falsetto: "There's a MAN in my room! There's a MAN in my room!" One of the residents ("that pretty girl with the long, black hair") ran downstairs. ("She come ripping down the stairs in her nightgown!") Hutton called the police who were, all-in-all, very good about it. "They found the Trainer boy in the hall up there."

"Which one?" I asked quickly.

"Not Don. He was asleep on the floor in his mother's room. The new one."

"Why was Don sleeping in his mother's room?"

Hutton couldn't possibly know the answer to this and wanted to get on with his story. "Doug's mother had rented him a room in the back wing." I nodded in affirmation of this. "Well, he claimed he had been going to his mother's room for another blanket." Hutton's eyebrows rose in sickles. "In the middle of August? And he went into the girl's room, what's right next to his. The girl said she got woke when she felt a hand on her back. He said he thought he was in his mother's room. Her heart stopped, she said. She told me she didn't even remember how she got downstairs."

So then Douglas was not quite normal either. I knew I should pity Mrs. Trainer, but all I could think of was what this would do to Don.

I had an appointment with our accountant and we were closeted in his downtown office all day long. When I left, the streets were filled with a rush of workers, done with their day, hurrying home. The winds blew, the street lamps had been lit, and as I walked through the crowds I felt quite alone, and though I didn't want to go home, I couldn't face the club yet either. I crossed the Commons to Charles Street and entered a little diner I have been patronizing since I began my work at the club.

Lately, I have been saving my money by dining at home, and so Niki the cook welcomed me boisterously. This, and his excellent omelette, warmed me. I felt enough fortified to go back to the club to untangle some of the problems the accountant had discovered that day.

The first thing I saw was a note in the manager's bold hand which stared up at me from the center of the desk. "The shared-bath rooms in the back wing are NOT to be rented to male guests," it announced.

"So they're shutting the barn door after the bull has gotten in," I thought, somewhat wildly. I had already decided against such a practice, and booking Doug Trainer had not been my error, but Hutton's, or perhaps the foolish young part-time reservation clerk we keep. The note was the only response to the episode of the previous night, so since Doug had checked out that morning it seemed that no action at all would be taken. I had imagined Mrs. Trainer being barred from the club, her home. I opened my ledger.

It was frustrating work, and I seemed to be making no headway so I decided to practice my French for a while. I am learning French through a correspondence school, and every month they send me a new tape which I listen to on a small, new tapeplayer with headphones when I ride the trains to and from work. The machine does not completely block out the world, but tends rather to act as a buffer.

"On forme l'imparfait interrogatif et negatif comme le present interrogatif et negatif. Example: Savez-vous? Saviez-vous? Savent-ils? . . . "

"Savaient-ils?"

"Est-ce qu'elle sait?"

"Est-ce qu'elle savait?"

The telephone rang. It was Hutton informing me that his car had broken down, and he couldn't get to the club until about ten. I told him I would wait for him.

"Est-ce que vous savez?"

"Est-ce que vous saviez?"

The door-bell buzzed and the video monitor flashed on. I could see Mrs. Trainer leaning heavily against the front door, and a jumble of voices crowded through the speaker. I pressed the buzzer on the desktop to admit them.

Mrs. Trainer came in first. Her face looked blurred to me, and her coat was oddly buttoned. "Hullo, Miss Smith," she mumbled, as she swerved into the darkened Copley Lounge across the hall from my office. She was closely followed by Don, who barely nodded as he came in. Lastly, a tall, stooped man in dark clothes entered. He didn't notice me at all, but paused, half-facing the door to the lounge for nearly a minute, drawing his breath with a whistling sound. He was balding and unremarkable save for a reddish birthmark that blossomed over his right cheek and eyelid. He took a step toward the stairs, faltered, then turned and walked through the doors across the hall and vanished from my view.

This, I presumed, was the long-awaited Mr. Trainer. I re-wound my tape.

"Savent-ils?. . . . . Est-ce qu'elle sait?"

Mrs. Trainer's voice rose and fell, and another, deeper voice made brief replies.

"Est-ce que vous savez?"

The voices in the other room became

more insistent, forcing their way into the silences of the tape. Mrs. Trainer bravely spoke: "I understand, Joseph, of course, I understand *now*. Being the true gentleman that you are, when you once began the affair, you felt you *had* to marry the creature."

"Tu n'as pas."

"Tu n'avais pas."

"Joseph, at breakfast you saw those two beautiful boys? We *made* them. You and I made those boys together."

"Y a-t-il? . . . " Did she know, was she trying to tell him, then, that they had perhaps done something wrong, in the making?

"J'ai mangé."

"Joseph!"

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Trainer," I whispered. She had handled him, regardless of the alcohol, quite well until then. Now her voice came in fits and starts, breathless through her weeping.

"Just answer this for me. Would you, would you. Take. Me. Back. Now?"

I didn't see how I could bear it any longer, and then Donald walked out of that room. I looked directly up into his face and finally took off the headphones. He sat on the corner of my desk. I didn't move. Mrs. Trainer's voice had stopped; only the sounds of her crying crossed the hall. For one terrifying moment I thought Donald would try to kiss me again. He had come so close to me, sat on that desk, only one other time, at least two years ago. And he had looked at me in just the way that he was doing now, and then he had bent down, and curved his cold hand around the back of my neck, beneath my hair, and kissed me on the lips. And then I had turned my face away and said, "Don't."

And he said, "Why not?"

I didn't really have an answer, but my voice came out sounding calm and certain. "Because." And then twenty reasons swarmed to my lips, but they weren't real and I wasn't sure that I believed them myself, though *he* might, so I spoke none of them. It didn't matter, because he didn't press me further; he walked out.

His eyes were blue. He was looking at me now, as if he needed something desperately, but couldn't ask. His lips began to move, "Can I get some water?"

I breathed, my rib cage expanding, my lungs filling, until I felt something go "Ping." I let all the air go sighing out and said, "Donald, don't you know where the glasses are? And the ice?" And then we began to hear his mother again.

He hopped down from my desk. "Is there ice?"

I clenched my teeth. "Go upstairs to the second floor. Walk through the dining room to the right. There are three steps you go up, and walk through the terrace room towards the kitchen. Just before you get to the kitchen there is an ice machine on the left. There are racks of glasses next to it."

"Thirty years," she wailed, "thirty years of my life to you and our sons! Have you forgotten it all? Don't you feel anything? We *made* those boys. You and I made them."

Donald started to go, but I stopped him. I shivered. At the nape of my neck I felt the chill imprint of a hand. He leaned over the desk. "Donald," I said, "When you go back, please, please close those doors."

It was exactly one week later that Donald disappeared. He took no clothes, left no message or note; Mrs. Trainer told me. I felt sure that he was dead. His mother's drinking was out of control. Every time she saw me she would ask, "Have you seen Donald?" Sometimes she would ask more than once in the same day. She seemed to have forgotten Doug. It was as though he had appeared one day, and then disappeared, and when she didn't have him with her, in the flesh, he ceased to exist. Her face had become grey and gone slack, and she no longer went to get her hair done, though she still managed, most days, to get herself to work.

Then, after several weeks, Donald came in one afternoon. I almost didn't see him, for he came in as several club women were going out. He wouldn't have stopped, but I jumped up. "Donald!" I called.

He turned and looked at me as I stood there. "My mother has my clothes here. I came to get my clothes." Then he turned again and started up to her room. I followed him up to the third floor, heedless of my duties at the desk.

"Donald," I said, "Donald, does your mother know you're here?"

"No. Why, should she?" He sounded like another person. "Are you afraid I'll steal something?"

"Donald," I said furiously, "do you realize your mother has been worried to death about you?"

"Really? Why's that?"

"She cares about you. She loves you."

He dropped the polo shirt he had been holding and took a step towards me. "So what," he spoke in a tight voice, "I don't need it, and I hope she smothers in it. Now, you get out."

I ran downstairs and called his mother at work. By the time she arrived, he had already left and I thought she had missed him, but she said she had met him on the street. "He's joined the Moonies," she told me.

After this she stopped asking if I had seen her son. For a while she stopped talking to me at all, and then she began asking only if I had known him. "Miss Smith," she would say tiredly, "you remember my little Donald?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Did you know him?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever find that he was . . . unhappy?"

I would want to scream, but gently I would say, "Yes, yes."

"I hurt, Miss Smith. My husband and I . . . you met my husband last summer? — we *made* that boy, and we failed."

Not because I meant it, but because I felt I had to give some bit of comfort, I would say, believing she expected it of me, "You can't know that." Or, "That's not true."

A wreck of woman, now, Mrs. Trainer would sob, "I don't feel bad because of where he is now, but because of the misery that could make *that* seem like an escape." How lucid she was, in her grief, and then: "Did you know my little fellow, Donald?"

And you, my reader, perhaps you wonder also, what became of me. Perhaps you now wish me to tell you that I decided to take a trip to Paris, or look for a new job, in a modern office, or that I got myself engaged. I have done none of these things, however, for I find, in a curious way, that I belong here, and will remain, with Mrs. Trainer, Miss Small, and the others, with the dust motes and the peeling paint, the smooth, cool feel of the marble floors, and the shards of purple light that sometimes scatter across it.

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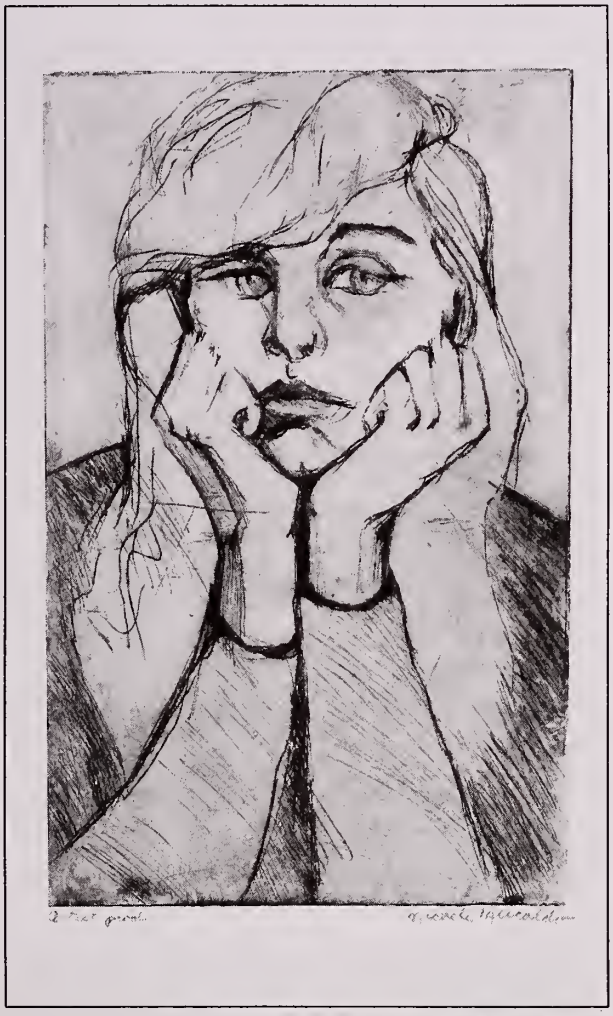
Ridiculous Supposition

Alex Sanders



Michelle Mercaldo

Liz began her cross-country journey not by heading east out of San Francisco, but by heading south. She had planned to spend a few days in Santa Cruz to say goodbye to her friends down there and to linger for a few last hours in the "real" California, before entering the horrible maze of southern California and from there turning eastward toward the blank parts of the map.

As it turned out, she was especially glad she had decided to say goodbye to Gertie and Dr. Bob. For some reason she was bleeding a whole hell of a lot, and she knew that Bob could help her. She parked slightly up the street from their house so they wouldn't notice her arrival and walked, carefully, the long way around the block and then downhill towards the post office. She had to mail the letter to Sid, to seal the plan for their rendezvous, before Dr. Bob could tell her she shouldn't drive. Then she sat on the seawall for a bit, imagining that her cramps were just part of the ocean, all part of the same moon-pulled primordial soup. She picked out the spot on the beach where, every Saturday, she and Bob had discussed his soup theory, played with his and Gertie's baby and waited for five o'clock.

Five o'clock was when Gertie closed her shop and when cocktail hour began. Liz mentally recreated their usual Saturday homecoming as she walked back up the hill. It was always funny when they startled one of Gertie's elegant customers who had lingered too long over the selection of a scarf or robe. Suddenly the three of them would arrive, beach chairs piled on the canopy of the stroller, diaper bag and knapsacks slung over their sunburned shoulders, and the baby's face and clothes smudged and sticky. Bob would be chanting, "G and T, G and T, baby wants his G and T," and Gertie would rush to the porch to help shake all the sand out of things before she would let any of them through the door of her shop. The memory of one particularly pompous lady rushing down the front path away from such an unruly trio made Liz laugh as she reached the front porch. She realized that laughing hurt, though, and held her abdomen for a moment before opening the front door.

Expecting a customer, Gertie came through the curtain separating her messy kitchen from the elegant dress shop in her most imperious English fashion—head high, runway walk, with a smug, placid face.

"Only me, Gert . . . at ease. I can't afford this stuff." Liz tried her best to sound cheerful.

Gertie dropped the façade in an instant. "Well, there's always that millionaire of yours. Come on in, ducks, have some tea. Bob'll be down in a flash. He's diaperin' the little man." Liz's cheerful routine did not fool Gertie for long. It was only a matter of minutes before she was insisting that Bob take Liz to the clinic. And when they got there Bob ignored all the usual red tape. He had a nurse-practitioner give Liz an exam, drew some blood for the lab, and they were back within an hour.

Later that night, when the baby was finally asleep and the three of them were talking in the living room above the shop, the lab phoned with the results. Dr. Bob had had a few drinks and had to pause for a moment before he could put together what he was supposed to say to Liz. He wasn't protected by his usual professional stance. In some ways he was closer to Liz than to anyone else, even Gertie. They shared a childish delight in many things which Gertie couldn't appreciate.

"Well, I'm not sure if this is good or bad," he began, staring past Liz on the couch into the dark reflection of the window, "but we know for sure why you're bleeding. And normally, I mean if we hadn't run the tests right away, we'd just say that it was a heavy period. But . . . this happens a lot and it's usually not even detected."

"So, Bob, what is it?" Gertie was concerned and annoyed that Bob was being so evasive.

"Liz, you've had a miscarriage. I mean no big deal. Six weeks at best."

Bob stood there, as Liz sat and tried not to cry.

"Look at it this way, dear—" Gertie moved towards her on the couch. "How can you lose something you never even knew you had, that is, until it was too late?" She took Liz's hand.

"I know, but . . ." Liz was crying now. "Get me some Kleenex please . . . and another drink." Gertie picked up the glasses and went down the spiral staircase into the kitchen. Bob, still confused, came and crouched beside Liz and put his arm around her.

"Liz, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He'd lost his professional detachment and his blasé veneer in one short moment, and now he was crying also. "I didn't know. Oh, Liz." He sat on the floor at her feet now, his head on her lap, and sobbed. Liz stroked his black hair, and it was hard to tell who was comforting whom.

On the final run from Columbus to Cleveland, Sid looked into his rear view mirror, and his glance became a gaze. He thought he could see tired people, tearful, slumping, gazing into a screen, their faces illuminated. It had seemed so winnable this time, as if an individual could make a difference, especially one named Mather. If only he, if only *they* had worked hard enough, it could have passed. After all, it had only been the state of Ohio, not the whole bloody country.

As he drove along, mesmerized by the highway, more distant images shifted across his vision. He could just barely make out his mother's slim figure on the convention floor, like one tiny sparrow amid a flock. She had actually been there, in Miami, and it had seemed then that she had made a difference. *They* had made a difference. It was winnable . . . it had to be, until that damned screen told them otherwise. There were the tired people again, huddled and crying. Sid decided that he was going to throw away his T.V. Shoot the messenger. It was the only sensible thing to do.

Finally he arrived at his parents' house. It stood out starkly amid the bare trees. Trees offered little protection this time of year. No one was home. He'd made good time and had beaten his parents home from their meeting. Inside, the first order of business was a Scotch, forget the water. Then he disarranged his father's pathologically neat pile of wood and lit a fire. On the mantle was his priority mail. His mother had thoughtfully sifted out anything that might be distressing. She would happen to "find" all the nasty stuff in a few days. He had asked that the mail to his house in Cincinnati be directed here, so many weeks ago, because he didn't want to miss all the hearty letters of congratulation. He laughed at his ridiculous supposition, finished his drink and poured another one before attending to the letters.

The top priority letter was discreetly hidden amid the rest. Hiding it was really unnecessary, because the return address—initials with a "care of" location typed on a business-sized envelope—was anonymous enough. But mothers have an eye for these things, especially if their sons are Mathers. He was thankful that his mother had spotted this letter, and that she had deemed it not to be distressing. In his present state the letter could only hold solace.

It was an odd sort of solace, though. It said Liz had decided to come east. That meant that she would rejoin her husband, rather than stay alone on the West Coast. Good or bad news? Sid couldn't decide. Just news. But along the way she wanted to meet. Cleveland was out, for obvious reasons, so she had devised a plan whereby she would visit with "Candace," an old school friend, in New York City for five days following Thanksgiving. Reservations

Michelle Mercaldo

had been made at a "seedy but serviceable" hotel in the theatre district.

The final paragraph read, "By the time you read this I am already en route. If you can't make it to N.Y.C., I don't want to know about it. In order to keep mind and body together during the trek, I have to think that you will be there. The campaign is over . . . let someone else do the mopping up. No more excuses, O.W.S." O.W.S. stood for Old Weird Sid, a name her little brother had given him many, many years ago. Within her family the name had stuck, just as his nickname for her had. Her own family persisted in calling her Beth, but he knew that her driver's license, and probably even her marriage license, said Liz.

The next ten days would have to be devoted to recovery if he were to make it to New York. "Candace!" he muttered as he poured another drink. "How the hell am I going to live up to my namesake? I don't feel like a Candace at all. More like a Polly or a Doris." Driving to New York was absolutely out of the question, and since the Bottle Bill had lost, the need to look thrifty in the eyes of the public was over; he'd fly. Besides, after driving across the state of Ohio thirty-seven-and-a-half times in the past six months, he'd begun to see strange things in his rear view mirror. And where was that damn T.V., anyway? Never mind for now, he thought as he lay down in front of the fire. It would look more spectacular crashing and rolling down the ravine in the morning light. Besides, he might slip off the roof at night, he reasoned in his mother's calm voice. And then he'd let someone else do the mopping up . . . after the glass had splintered into a million shards and the twisted bits were strewn all over his father's pathologically neat woods.

Liz had made it all the way—from San Francisco to New York City—without a single traffic jam by avoiding cities as much as possible and, when cities were unavoidable, by avoiding rush hour. Her cunning failed her in New York, however, because in the theatre district 8:00 p.m. was the height of rush hour. It took nearly forty-five minutes through taxi-battling traffic to make it from the Parkway to the Trafalgar Hotel on 45th, just west of Broadway.

The challenge of Manhattan traffic was so absorbing that she had managed to forget exactly why she was headed towards that hotel. She remembered only after her car was safely tucked into the Trafalgar's vertical parking lot: Sid. She was panicked by the thought that he might already be there.

She had spent a weekend in the same hotel, with Candace, during a trip east two summers earlier. A quick glance around the lobby proved that the Trafalgar had come up in the world. The place could almost be called plush. Probably the prices were already in the plush range. She had to remind herself that she was now a woman from the cosmopolitan city of San Francisco, not a provincial girl from Cleveland. Anyway, New Yorkers were just pale silly tourists when you took them out of New York and plopped them down on the West Coast.

The last time they had objected that neither Candace nor Liz had credit cards. "What is this filthy green stuff?" This time she was prepared. She had a card. She was also prepared to carry her own bags. She had been strong enough to lug her suitcase into and out of a dozen motels along the way, so she was strong enough to carry it in New York. When she saw in her peripheral vision a figure materialize out of the shadows and come towards her she was mentally fortified to decline the bellboy's assistance. She started to walk across the lobby towards the desk but she could hear and vaguely see him closing in on her. He caught her elbow and she was about to wheel around and say, "How rude," when she heard Sid say, "Liz. You made it. Finally."

"Sid"—she was astonished and had slipped and hissed on the S—"Sid, you're here." She dropped her suitcase and hugged him. "Hot Damn! I don't believe it, O.W.S." Her face burrowed into his sweater at chest level, and Sid felt her tighten her embrace as she inhaled deeply. Sid had a unique and, to Liz at least, intoxicatingly sexy scent. Because he was a full head taller it was always his scent that she first noticed. He still smelled the same, which reassured her. This was really Sid, and not some artful counterfeit, because even in her most realistic dreams she could not actually smell him.

Sid had arrived in New York early in the afternoon, and he had been sitting in the lobby and reading, half-hidden by a potted palm, since 4:00. The reservations were under Liz's maiden name, Kinsey. He had explained to the desk manager in a very confidential tone that, for reasons of anonymity, it was necessary to use his wife's maiden name when making travel reservations, "So as not to disquiet the staff, or alert the . . . ah, fourth estate." Although outside of Cleveland, the Mathers had no real need for anonymity—they were known only to a few bankers, stock brokers and foundation chairmen—the manager was quite pleased to imagine that he had some sort of V.I.P. on the premises. He was also a little set back that he was so far out of touch that he hadn't spotted a V.I.P. in his very own lobby. Sid requested that their accomodations be upgraded to "something more suitable"—for he knew that Liz had booked a budget room—and finished off the performance with a flourish of an American Express gold card.

"Of course, sir. We will be more than delighted to direct Mrs. Mather to your suite."

"Good, very good of you. But please remember that she will identify herself as a Kinsey." Ten years ago playing this role would have made Sid edgy, but he had become reconciled to the idea of money and had learned how to smooth over awkward situations with it, or with the mere intimation of it.

When the manager noticed Liz in Sid's arms he snapped his fingers at the bellboy and said, "Mather's wife has shown up. Don't just let her suitcase lie there in the middle of the lobby."

The bellboy tugged at his sleeves as he crossed to where Sid and Liz were standing, looking at each other face to face. He stood slightly behind Liz and addressed Sid, "Shall I take Mrs. Mather's bag to your suite, sir?" Sid simply nodded yes, but Liz's face went pale, her eyes widened, and her mouth dropped open in the moment that it took her to realize what the bellboy had said. The first grain of shock was caused by the thought that, for some twisted reason, Sid's mother had insisted on coming along. The full force of it hit when Liz understood that the bellboy had been referring to her. Sid looked at the ceiling and grinned, but once the bellboy was safely out of range he laughed and said, "Well hell, Liz, if *I* can be Candace, *you* can be Mrs. Mather." He put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her towards him, but she was blank and numbly slack.

"I don't know if I should laugh or cry, Sid," Liz said softly, realizing that she was stuck in the role.

"Well, considering who your 'Mr. Mather' is, crying's probably more like it. Haven't you read in the columns about what a rat I am?" Sid was trying to get her to smile, but she had missed his joke.

"What columns?" she asked.

"C'mon, let's eat," Sid said. "There's a nice, dark little place just up the street. Perfect for explaining complicated plots."

Sid refused to take the subway. He was afraid that he would pass out and collapse. He didn't want Liz to know about his fainting spells, but she had found out when they were at the theatre on Saturday night. During the intermission Sid had to admit that he had missed a good deal of the first act.

"But how could you fall asleep? It's such a good play. You picked it, afterall."

"I passed out. It happens every now and then. I've been meaning to see a doctor, but I'm O.K. now. It doesn't happen all that often."

"Are you sure?" Liz looked at his face in the subdued light of the lobby and tried to remember exactly how pale he was supposed to be. His hands were freezing, and she could tell that he had planned to hide this from her. "What should I do if . . ."

"Bury me with my boots on, gal."

"Sid!" Liz was becoming alarmed. She saw ambulances and tubes and frantic phone calls to Cleveland. She herself had just narrowly missed a "surgical procedure" only because the doctor was a friend who had common sense.

"No, seriously. It's just too much campaign. Burn out. Too much . . ." Sid stiffened and focused his attention on something across the lobby. "Hey Liz, do you know the Stevenses?"

"Sounds familiar. Mom might. Why?" She wondered if he were trying to divert her attention from the state of his health.

"Well, Mrs. Stevens is in New York, it seems, and is just on the other side of the lobby. I worked very closely with her daughter on the campaign."

Liz's initial reaction was a desire to find out just *how* closely Sid had worked with the daughter, but in an instant she realized that a quick disappearance was more important.

"Damn. Why don't Clevelanders just stay home and admire the Terminal Tower and the bus depot? I'll find the bathroom." She started to move away.

"Too late." Sid smiled and casually waved to a middle-aged woman crossing the lobby. "Just be cool. The less said the better. You look different now, even if she did know you." He tried to sound convincing, but he was just as nervous as Liz. There was a potential that this meeting in a theatre lobby could turn into an item in a real column back home. Sid was considered highly eligible.

He handled himself well. He introduced Liz simply as a friend from California and avoided giving her name. Mrs. Stevens was more concerned about her own daughter's relationship to Sid, and was trying to persuade him to come to dinner so that "our families might become better acquainted."

It was difficult for Liz to stand there, imagining Sid with this horrible woman's daughter. Her jaw tightened and she clenched her fist behind her back. Finally, she managed completely to block out the insipid conversation by focusing on a light on the lobby wall and imagining the beach in Santa Cruz. She could hear the waves, and then Dr. Bob's voice, and finally it seemed that she could actually feel what she was imagining. The lights blinked; Liz came out of the trance and mechanically shook hands with Mrs. Stevens without saying a word. She knew that she should be thankful that she hadn't been recognized, and yet she found it difficult to concentrate on the play because of Mrs. Stevens's daughter, and because she had to check every few moments to see if Sid was still conscious.

As they walked out of the theatre, Liz clung to Sid's arm a little tighter than usual. They hadn't had enough time for dinner before the play, so now they were haphazardly searching for a restaurant and looking into shop windows. Their reflection in one of the windows made them aware of playing couple. Liz stretched herself a little taller, encouraged by Sid's height, and Sid slowed his pace a bit. He could always see her head and catch the changing light reflected off her hair as they walked together.

They had known each other for so long that the familiarity which couples acquire came easily. Walking together, sedately and maturely as if they had aged together, was more difficult at first. It had to be choreographed in the beginning, but after two days they had learned their parts so well that everything seemed very natural. It was so natural to be together that it was frightening to them.

When the conversation ebbed, as it did in the Hungarian restaurant they had chosen, they were too content simply to gaze at each other. It was not the sort of aimless, infatuated ogling that new lovers tend towards—(but) of course there was some of that—but more a sort of taking stock. They were both trying to compare their most recent memories of each other to the current appearance of the other. Liz noticed that some grey had crept into Sid's straight black hair. That was when it hit her that he had turned thirty since she had last seen him. Sid noticed that Liz made a habit of wearing makeup now, and wondered if it really was a habit, or if it was in deference to New York chic.

Earlier in the day they had investigated the Village. Sid was fairly certain that she hadn't been wearing make-up then. She had tired him out, and he was relieved when they finally made it to Washington Square because he could sit on a bench. She had sat with him for a while but eventually was drawn into a small crowd watching an acoustic punk band. He watched her watching the band, partly because he felt it was his duty to protect her but partly because he just enjoyed watching her. He had watched her for weeks before he had ever spoken with her, and for a moment, because they were both dressed in jeans and ratty sweaters, as they had usually been dressed then, and because he was once again watching her from a distance, it seemed that no time had passed. The odd mixture of emotions—paternal protectiveness and straight-out lust—still bothered him.

She began clapping and dancing along with the crowd, and the patina of sophistication, which he had become aware of on this trip, disappeared. She still had the same child-like quality that had first attracted him, but because she had been barely more than a child at the time he had felt somehow dishonorable. He recalled that more than one of his friends and her relatives had used

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the term "Cradle-robber" when discussing their romance so many—how many?—oh God, it had started over ten years ago. Five measly years had made him a cradle-robber, stealing a child/woman from her family, and now what difference did they make?

Sid was staring out of the hotel window, absent-mindedly watching a matinee crowd dispersing, while Liz took a bath. The sound of the running water had put him in a meditative mood. He was thinking about a summer afternoon eighteen months earlier. He had been in between houses, having sold his house in Cleveland before passing papers on the Cincinnati place, and was staying at his parents' house. Charlie, his youngest brother who was home for the summer, returned from a shopping trip downtown and said, "Hey, you'll never guess who I ran into today. Liz Kinsey. She's visiting her parents."

"Oh really?" Sid put down his guitar. "Where'd you see her?" He was, for some odd reason, disturbed by this news.

"Book Mart. I was looking for a script. Had to special-order it."

"How'd she look?" Sid tried to sound only vaguely interested.

"Oh, pretty good. Tan. Shorter."

"Shorter! Must be you're taller, you think?"

"Yeah. I mean I didn't measure her or anything. She smelled good though. Perfume or something."

"Oh really? Was she . . ."

"See for yourself, Sid. She's coming over after dinner tonight." Sid gulped, and realized that he wasn't doing anything that night. He was ecstatic, but also terrified at the prospect, and wondered if he could manufacture something that simply *had* to be taken care of that evening. "We're gonna talk over old times at the Castle Theatre." Charlie added, "maybe play some poker, eat a lot of Taco Doritos, just like the old days."

"Why didn't you ask me first? I mean she was *my* girlfriend, you twit."

"Sidney, I'm a big boy now. I can ask a lady . . ."

"Woman," Sid interjected. "Anyway, isn't she a little old for you?"

"Only two or so years . . . besides, she's married."

"Married?" Sid was nearly shouting, "What . . . when did she?"

"Calm down, will you? *You* ask her. I just want to play poker and smell her. If there's some problem with that . . . well, it isn't my problem." Charlie started up the stairs with his packages.

Sid called after him, "What time?"

"Eight or so. Bringing some California wine she was on about," Charlie yelled as he shut his bedroom door.

Sid was absolutely panicked. He tried to figure out my he was reacting like a teenager so that he could put a stop to it, so that his hands would stop shaking and his stomach would uncurl itself. First he took a shower, and then, throwing clothes all over his room, he dressed, undressed, and re-dressed, trying to find the perfect combination. He chose his T-shirt from the A.C.L.U. softball team. It showed that he was serious and involved, and yet playful. Soccer shorts? He worried that his knees were too boney. But his new jeans were just too new, sort of like armor. He ended up borrowing a pair of pants from Charlie. They were an inch or so too wide, and an inch too short, but he hoped that it wouldn't be noticeable.

He tried to eat, to please his mother who had just discovered the joys of Chinese cooking, but the rice stuck in his throat and offended his stomach. While the rest of the family was still at the table he retired to the front porch and started rearranging the canvas chairs. He'd put them into position and taken a few steps up the driveway and scrutinized his work like a scene designer dressing a stage. He pictured himself casually draped in various positions and tried to decide which position seemed the most natural.

He went back into the kitchen for a beer and noticed that it was barely 7:30. It was still light enough to read, so he picked up a newspaper in the living room, but decided that *The Plain Dealer* did not present the proper image. He took a Sherlock Holmes reader off a shelf and returned to the porch.

Finally he saw headlights coming up the long dirt driveway, and a dark Dodge pulled into the parking area next to his Volvo. "Her Dad always did like Dodges," he said aloud to himself.

"Yeah, and her Mom drives Buicks, I'll bet," Charlie said from the other side of the screen door.

"Charlie . . . what the hell?" Sid jumped.

"This bird is my guest, old man," Charlie said in an exaggerated English accent.

"O.K., for about half an hour. Then clear out."

"Look Sid, if I'd known that she still got to you like this I'd never have . . ."

"Shhh," Sid interrupted him in a vehement whisper, "shut up! Here she comes. Now just be cool." He heard the car door shut and turned to watch her walk into the pool of light thrown

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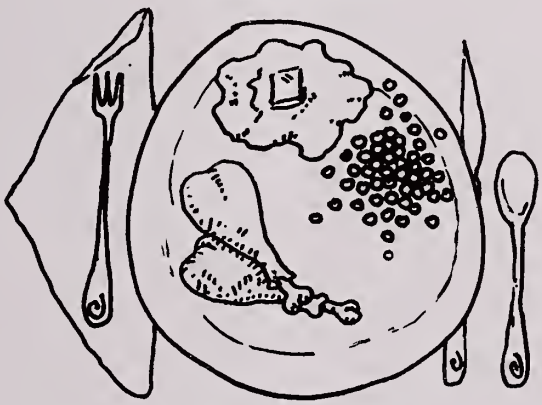

"If you're there, try it"

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by a lamp just inside the door. He noticed that the sun had set and put down the book.

Charlie stepped onto the porch, stood slightly behind Sid, and said in a low voice, "Steady, bro. She's just an old girlfriend. You've got millions of them." Sid had to stifle an incredibly strong urge, which frightened him because he was not by any means violent, to wheel around and slug his little brother. He was shaking by the time Liz stepped onto the porch.

She was carrying a bottle of wine and set it down next to the nearest chair. She seemed exotic and graceful in a sun dress with thin straps and a loose-knit white sweater, as if she had just arrived from a tropical island. Sid stood numb, stupid, sort of grinning. He had forgotten all of the clever things that he had thought about saying. "Hi, Sid. Hi ya Charlie," Liz said as she shook hands with Charlie. Sid raised his right hand, slowly as if a weak magnet were drawing it upwards, but Liz had stepped around it and hugged him. This is just the way you say hello on the West Coast, Sid thought, but it seemed like a more solid, sincere gesture. She held on for a few seconds too long and said, "Oh Sid, it's so good to see you." He squeezed her a little, then let go. Sid noticed, and hoped that Liz hadn't, that Charlie was smugly humming the tune to "If it takes forever." He wanted to hit him again.

Sid sent Charlie to the kitchen to open the wine while Liz and Sid sat and began talking. It had been six years and they had a lot to cover. They began with what Berkeley had been like, and Sid congratulated her on graduating, which was something he hadn't managed to do. Sid had begun to tell her about his job at the Free Clinic when Charlie returned with the wine and three glasses. Mrs. Mather was following, carrying a plate of fruit and cheese. She was trying to get Sid to eat *something*, since he hadn't managed to eat much at dinner. Sid stood up and took the plate from her.

"Hello, Mrs. Mather." Liz shook hands with her. "Wouldn't you care to join us?"

Sid and Charlie were both mentally chanting, "No, no, no."

"No, but thank you. Wine really does wreak havoc in my stomach. All that acid in the wine." Mrs. Mather didn't look that much older, and she was dressed in her casual way, so that it seemed just possible that she borrowed some of her sons' clothes.

Charlie realized that it would be at least forty-eight hours before the conversation got around to the Castle Theatre, and that poker was out of the question, so after about an hour of more or less being ignored he said good night and went to his room to watch T.V. When it began to get cold outside, and when everyone else had gone to bed, Liz and Sid went down to his mother's comfortable "office" in the basement. The wine was long gone, so they switched to Scotch and soda. They were up until 4:00, just talking, each afraid to touch the other, but also afraid that when the night ended it would be over again. Eventually Liz realized that she had to be in bed when *her* mother woke up, so she got up to leave. As she was about to get into her car, Sid found the courage to kiss her and said, "I'll call you tomorrow. I can delay Cincinnati for a few days."

Neither of them slept at all that night. Sid lay in his bed, his mind filled with a random collection of scenes. He saw Liz as she had been then; running through the woods, or making a speech about student rights, or simply sitting and listening as he played new songs for her. The old scenes were interspersed with images from that past evening. Liz was laughing, or Liz was puzzled, or Liz was crying when he played that song he had written for her. She had recognized it immediately. Near dawn he was repeating over and over to himself, "Oh shit, oh no. Oh now I've done it. Oh shit, I love her."

Liz lay awake also, going over the conversation from one angle, and then another. She had thought that so many years gone by would make it easy to deal with and keep emotion out of it. She had thought that it would be possible to check in, say hello, and step away again with no side-effects. The bit of conversation that was most prominent was Sid asking in a pained way, almost shouting, almost crying, "Why the *fuck* didn't you call me before you got married?" and she couldn't answer. She could have said, "I didn't realize that you still cared," but after a silence she said, "Why didn't you write me when I went to Berkeley?" which Sid couldn't answer. It had seemed to him at the time, once the campaign had ended and McGovern had lost, when he realized that she really was gone, that she had left him. She had cruelly walked away when he really needed her. Then someone else had come along, someone his age. He couldn't even remember who because, Charlie was right, there *had* been a million of them. Someone had come along and done the mopping up.

All that was clear when Sid drove her to the airport three days later was that they were both in a lot of trouble. They had a situation that neither of them could control.

As Liz bathed she thought about that airport scene. The long ride out to the airport, the same ride that usually seemed to go on forever through suburbs, and city, and then suburbs again, had been compressed into what seemed a short instant. They had discussed music. Sid played a tape of some string quartet, and told her about his plans to learn to play the bass. She couldn't recall what else they had discussed, but she could recall that they both avoided difficult subjects.

The airport was harsh and stark. The colorful travel posters taunted her. We could go there, she thought, right now. We could just go. Fly away in a smooth parabolic ascent and live on dividends and an hourly wage.

Silently they walked down the corridor to the last gate. Boarding had already begun, and vacationing families were awkwardly making their way into the telescoping tunnel while the business flyers waited patiently for the confusion to die down before finding their seats. When time was nearly up, and Liz knew that she really had to get on the plane because no simple solution was about to appear, she had stopped trembling and begun to cry. She had clung to Sid, and then half turned away trying to hide her face, and then embraced him again.

Sid had given some thought to what he would say and, at the very last moment, while the gate steward was watching from a distance holding a rope, he said, "Courage. Now I want to see you smile." Liz made an attempt. "Good. Now when you get to California, when you step off of that plane, no tears. No morose moping. I want you to smile. This isn't *his* problem, and he doesn't deserve to suffer for it. Do you hear me?" Liz nodded, blowing her nose. The steward was becoming impatient, and Sid silently asked him for one more moment.

"Sid, I'll try. Because I love you. But I don't know . . ." Liz had managed to stop crying. "You have Gertie's address?" Sid nodded. "I love you Sid," she said as she hugged him again, trying to make sure that she'd remember what his body felt like. She had pulled away from him and put on her sunglasses as she walked into the tunnel. By the time her plane had landed in San Francisco four hours later, he had written the first page of a letter and drunk half a pint of Scotch.

Liz didn't take Sid to La Guardia. She left Wednesday morning after breakfast, heading north; she wanted to get into Boston before dark. This time there had been no tears. At breakfast they had discussed how they might manage to make it to Killington. Candace *did* like to ski. They laughed about how Liz had learned to ski. She had followed Sid down slope after slope, falling and rolling and giggling until, after two "lessons", she could easily keep up with him, although in a madly erratic and clownish style. She didn't take it all that seriously, even though she enjoyed the flying sensation of a downhill run, and the unpredictable nature of a difficult, bumpy slope.

"Killington isn't like the High Sierras," Sid said at breakfast. "You'll probably think the runs in Vermont are boring, not alpine at all."

"I guess I will miss California," Liz admitted. "It was hard to decide to leave."

"Because of skiing?"

"Yes, and beaches," she paused, "and I'm not sure if things will work out in Boston."

"Are you going to tell him about the miscarriage?" Sid had found out the nature of Liz's mysterious ailment the night before. Love-making had been so gingerly cautious because there was still a little pain, and Liz had been afraid that she might start bleeding again.

"I don't know yet," Liz said, trying to ignore the nauseating, wrenching feeling that thinking about it brought back.

"You should have told me," Sid sounded hurt and brooded as he sipped his tea and pretended to eat his eggs.

"You've got enough to worry about. I slipped up, talking about it. It's not your problem." Liz did not like to discuss certain aspects of her life — marital aspects — with Sid.

"Damn it, Liz. Of course it's my problem. First of all, you're in pain. Second of all I could have hurt you. Are you sure that flakey doctor of yours said that it was O.K. to make love?"

"Bob is *not* flakey! And of course I'm sure. He didn't do a D and C because it was only six weeks," Liz did not like to have to defend Dr. Bob, either.

"Do me a favor . . . see someone in Boston. Just to make sure that you're O.K." Sid reached across the table and took her hand, "This is more serious than you think Liz." He tried to picture her pregnant, but his thoughts got confused with all of the frightened women and girls he had admitted to the Free Clinic, afraid that they were pregnant, or miserably depressed because they were. "I mean, you've lost a baby."

"It was not a baby! It wasn't even a foetus. It was an embryo — and it — and it's gone. I lost it, and that's all." Even as she protested she knew that Sid was partially right. Physically the side effects were unimportant, but she had cried herself to sleep every night along the way. It was only for Sid's sake that she had managed to keep herself under control in New York. At least until the previous night. "But it's sweet of you to care. You are also not typical. Most men just can't deal with these female things. Either they discount it all together, 'real blood comes from real wounds, battles and fights,' or else they turn green and faint at the sight of a Tampon box. But you're unique."

"Is that a compliment?" Sid asked.

"It could be, but you worry too much. You just concentrate on your own health, and on making it to Killington in good shape."

"Are you sure that you can manage this "Candace" bit again? Won't he . . ."

"Sid, you're worrying again. *He* is my problem, too. Anyway, he doesn't like to ski. Thinks it's silly. So are beaches and he hates New York City. That gives us a bit of room to maneuver."

"Why does he hate beaches?" Sid was trying to piece together a composite image of her husband.

"Too hot and too sandy. Skiing is frivolous, and New York City is an abomination of everything that civilization stands for," Liz recited from memory. "You know, he was offered a job in New York, and he didn't even tell me about it?"

"I'm not sure I'd move to New York, either," Sid was surprised that he was making comparisons, "but I'd discuss it with you. Give you a chance to convince me. I know it'd be good for your career. They must need theatre managers here."

"Yeah, but they've already got a lot of them. And I'm still *so* green. I'll have a try-out in Boston. How's it sound?" Liz was becoming playful, "Charlie'll be directing a pre-Broadway smash — the young genius fresh out of Yale — and he'll be really temperamental and give me hell."

"Not if you wear perfume, he won't," Sid said half-aloud.

"Perfume?" Liz asked.

"Never mind. Family joke. Not really funny at all."

Charlie reminded them of the Castle Theatre, and they reminisced, entertaining each other by re-telling old stories that they both knew; the time someone put Jello in Lady Macbeth's wine goblet, or whispered absurdities during a serious moment. Ten years removed it all seemed so funny, even the teetering sets and the missed cues.

Finally they had to admit that breakfast was over. Liz had already packed, and her suitcase was sitting under the table. Sid wanted to carry it to her car, but Liz refused. Another airport scene was unnecessary. After all, they were grownups now. They'd had a year-and-a-half to get things under control, and there'd been enough crying the night before.

She stood up, walked around the table, picked up her suitcase and whispered, "Courage, Sid. Courage." She kissed him on the forehead and abruptly turned towards the door. Heading up the street towards the garage, she had to walk past the window of the coffee shop. Sid watched her walk by, carrying her own suitcase, and knew that she purposely did not turn and look into the window.

Wavelength

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Laura Newbold

Incense is Best

Bill Paradis

Paul had left fifteen minutes before, seventy dollars poorer but with a glazed smile and a full pocket. I had just re-entered my apartment after running down to the corner store for another pack of rolling papers. I went into the livingroom where a box of Baggies and my triple-beam scale were sitting on the mirror-topped coffee table. I took a long swig from the bottle of Becks in my hand and sat down to roll a joint. I was just licking the glue when there was a heavy knock at the door.

Now I'm not paranoid, and that can be hazardous in my line of business, but I think people are basically trustworthy. I like to encourage that. My friends drop by at all hours without calling first anyway, and sometimes the door downstairs doesn't shut properly. I left the joint on the table and went to open the door.

Two policemen were standing in the hall, looking into my home.

They were both older men, grey-haired and paunchy, and they both had stripes on their sleeves. They looked like they had both just stepped out of an old *Dragnet* episode. Something went horribly wrong with my heart-rate.

The older looking, short pudgy guy spoke first. He had three stripes.

"You Bill?"

"Yeah . . ."

"You got a girl in there?"

My mind must have stepped out for a breath of fresh air. I didn't know what to say.

"Aaah— no— I don't think so— not lately, anyway."

The beefy two-striper stepped up to the door. He seemed to purposely put his foot on the threshold.

"Mind if we come in and look out your window?"

Oh Jesus. This is it. Pot in the livingroom, coke in a vial on my dresser, two-hundred and forty-five dollars on a table in nice small bills. Girl? Could they smell the pot smoke? Was there any coke on the mirror? I figured they weren't after me. Window? Did I seem paranoid?

Oh well.

"Come on in. Excuse the mess. You wanna go on the roof?"

The beefy guy stepped in. Three-stripes followed. They walked over to the kitchen window.

"There it is. Must be the place under this."

Three-stripes looked down at the window below and opposite mine in the back alley. The shade was drawn.

"Yep. Let's go have a visit downstairs."

He may have heard my sigh of relief.

They walked back into the hallway. I tried to stand between them and the livingroom, to block their view. Beefy stopped and looked at me. He grinned. "Lady downstairs doesn't believe in wearing clothes."

Wisdom silenced me. I don't much either.

"She don't pull her shades," said Three-stripes. He smiled too.

I tried to look surprised. I smiled, too, but it wasn't for what they thought it was.

I imagined the neighbors calling the station. The officer on duty hangs up the phone laughing. He tells his companions at the station what they said. A lot of people smile. The officer in charge is told. He smiles too, and puts on his cap. It has been a slow night. "Don't worry boys, I'll handle this one myself." He calls his buddy in Records and they check out a squad car.

My imagination was interrupted by Beefy, as he turned to go down the stairs.

"You oughta change that cat-shit box. You won't keep any gals up here long with that thing."

They left. I heard a soft chuckle on the stairs as I closed the door. Before they knocked downstairs I had locked it three times.

I lit a stick of incense and carried it into the livingroom, closing that door behind me as well.

I put all the dope in my stash box, hid the papers, and quickly brushed off the table. I turned on the radio and sat on the couch. My thoughts were storming around in a fit of aimless panic. Nod, my fat grey tiger cat, jumped up on my lap, purring. Stane, the little black one, curled up beside me. I bent down and kissed Nod's head, then pushed him off and went to the kitchen.

I opened a can of Nine Lives.

"Mackeral dinner," I called.

The cats came running in. It was their favorite flavor. I split the can among the three of them. The front door slammed five flights below. I heard men's laughter in the street.

I don't believe in dictating to people how they should live, especially in their own homes. I spend as much time as possible naked. I'm just more comfortable that way. I don't believe in turning people in to the law, either. I figure if they're doing something wrong it will catch up with them eventually. Karma, you know? But I support most policemen. Obviously the public needs service and protection. The incident downstairs didn't fit my idea of that but I didn't know any better at the time. I had had a different kind of protection in mind.

I walked into the bathroom and looked at the litter box. Three well-fed cats can fill one pretty quickly. I decided to leave it. I could take it out tomorrow with the garbage. My cats and I could handle it. We'd seen worse. If someone else didn't like it they could leave.

There was a knock at the door.

I called out from the bathroom, nervous.

"Who is it?"

There was a pause.

"It's me, Dave. You told me to come at seven."

"Dave's not here," I teased, walking to the door.

"C'mon Will, don't fuck around."

I slid the police lock over, snapped open the bolt and opened the door. The chain was still on. Through the crack I saw my friend Dave, a puzzled look on his face. I had told him to hurry over if he wanted that last gram. I slid off the chain and opened the door.

As he stepped in he winced and wrinkled his nose. He followed me into the livingroom. We sat down and I offered him the joint I had just rolled.

"You gotta change that cat-box," he said as I held the lighter to the joint.

I smiled, hauling out my scale again from under the chair. He exhaled, and the familiar blue-grey haze began filling the room.

"Every cloud has a silver lining," I said, rising to re-lock the door.

The Pub Club

Located on the third floor of building 010
Open Monday through Friday
12 noon to 7

Beer and Wine
Snacks

Full-length Feature Films
At 4 o'clock on Thursdays
You must be 20 to visit the pub

–Student Activities at UMass–

The Student Activities Committee (SAC) is a group of 24 students that are elected every February. SAC is responsible for organizing and administrating all programs funded by the Student Activities Trust Fund, which this year is projected to be $400,000. This fund accumulates from the $46.00 activities fee paid by each full time student. For more information about SAC services, contact us at x8260 or visit us at 1/4/181. The following are some of the services that are provided by SAC.

CULTURAL EVENTS: 1/4/116 x2813

*** Harbor Art Gallery:** 2/1/002
A student run gallery featuring professional and student art exhibits.

*** Lecture Series:**
Topical and controversial lectures. RSO requests welcome.

*** Black History Month:**
A number of events organized by the black students on campus during black history month.

*** Film Series:**
A weekly motion picture shown in the large science auditorium and the Pub.

*** Alternative Film Series:**
Films on current social/political issues shown at Earth Foods once a week.

*** Social Events:**
An open committee of students, responsible for planning SAC funded parties.

*** Ticket Series:**
Discount tickets sold at SAC office for sporting events, theatre and concerts.

MEDIA & PUBLICATIONS: 1/4/117 x2855

*** Wavelength:** 1/6/091
A quarterly literary & news magazine, published, funded & managed by students.

*** Mass Media:** 8/4/001
The weekly newspaper of the campus community, published, funded & managed by students.

*** WUMB:** Library/G1/067
The campus radio station, recently awarded an FM license.

*** Point Press:** 2/3/009
Quality printing & composition service done by students on campus.

*** The Pub:** 1/3/316
A lounge for the campus community to socialize in. Beer, wine and snacks available.

*** Office of the Student Trustee:**
Elected student representative on the Board of Trustees.

*** Advocacy Center:** 1/4/125
Acts as an advocate for students who are encountering difficulties with the University.

COMMUNITY ACTION:
Funds are used for student tutors, cultural programs, health services and educational supplies for the following:
*** Hand to Hand (Chinatown)**
*** UMass Childcare**
*** Roxbury Boys Club**
*** Toys for Tots**
*** W. Broadway Multi Service Center**

RECOGNIZED STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS (RSO):
* Over 100 clubs are funded by SAC. Each club receives an initial allocation of $124. Clubs can also apply for Special Allocations.
SAC Offices also at Park Square & Huntington Avenue Campuses.